The Chetnik Slaughterhouse

Nicholas Lupoli

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Nicholas Lupoli 2026

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Nicholas Lupoli seated in a chair, positioned before the flag of the wartime Independent State of Croatia.

Photograph taken in February 2026.

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Introduction

The history of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) has long been enveloped in a cloud of misconception, distortion, and often outright propaganda. For decades, the narrative that has dominated mainstream discourse has painted the NDH as a wholly evil, genocidal regime responsible for atrocities and crimes beyond forgiveness. This simplified portrayal has led to widespread condemnation, hatred, and rejection of anything associated with it, often without a nuanced understanding of the complex realities, motivations, and circumstances that shaped this turbulent period in history. The truth is far more layered, and the stories behind the events demand careful examination beyond the black-and-white narratives we have been fed.

Many people, influenced by decades of biased media, academic distortion, and political agendas, have come to see the NDH solely as a menace—a regime driven by hatred, cruelty, and an unthinkable desire to oppress. This perception has been reinforced through films, books, and popular culture that depict it as a symbol of fascist evil. But this narrative ignores the broader context of wartime chaos, foreign intervention, and internal struggles for survival. The reality is that the NDH was a product of its circumstances—faced with enemies who sought to annihilate it—and its actions, although contentious in mainstream history, can be understood only if we look at the full picture with an honest and open mind.

The NDH was born out of a desperate and urgent need to defend itself against a ruthless and murderous force—the Chetnik communists—who sought nothing less than the complete extermination of its people, culture, and independence.

These Chetniks, backed by foreign powers and driven by their own ideological motives, committed atrocities, massacres, and ethnic cleansing campaigns that would stain the pages of history. The NDH's measures—often severe—were, in many cases, acts of self-preservation and defense. To dismiss these actions outright as evil misses the vital point that they were responses to existential threats, not unprovoked acts of aggression.

It's crucial for us to understand that the measures taken by the NDH, including military actions and security policies, were often necessary responses to an ongoing campaign of terror. When a nation faces an enemy that openly aims to wipe it out—an enemy that commits atrocities on a genocidal scale—the options for survival become painfully limited. Viewing these actions through the lens of mere morality, without considering the context of war and survival, leads to a distorted perception that does not do justice to the complexities faced by those who lived through those harrowing times.

The common misconception is that the NDH was solely a genocidal regime, driven by racial hatred and barbarity. Yet, this oversimplification ignores the broader, more complicated realities of wartime Southeast Europe—where loyalties were divided, and survival often depended on difficult choices. The chaos of war, external influences, and internal divisions created a landscape where moral clarity was blurred. The narrative that reduces the NDH to a monolithic evil entity does not account for the nuances of power, fear, and desperation that influenced its actions.

A widely propagated idea is that the Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities in the region are inherently at odds—a narrative that has fueled division, hatred, and long-standing hostility. But this narrative is a distortion of reality. In truth, these faith communities share a long and

intertwined history, rooted in centuries of coexistence, mutual respect, and brotherhood. Their shared cultural and spiritual bonds have survived wars, invasions, and political upheavals, demonstrating that their relationship is far more complex and rooted in unity than in division.

The longstanding brotherhood between Catholics and Orthodox Christians in this region is a testament to the deep, enduring bonds that have existed for generations. These communities have supported each other through thick and thin, sharing traditions, festivals, and a collective identity that transcends religious differences. Their cooperation and solidarity have often been underestimated or ignored in the narratives that seek to divide them, yet history bears witness to countless examples of joint efforts, mutual respect, and shared struggles for freedom and survival.

The involvement of the Orthodox population with the pro-Chetnik forces was driven by a multitude of complex reasons—most notably, the sinister influence of the Bolsheviks and their revolutionary ideology. The Bolsheviks, with their ruthless desire to impose global communism, aimed to crush any resistance, regardless of nationality or faith. For Orthodox Serbs and others, supporting the Chetniks was often a defensive response to this external threat—a way to protect their communities from annihilation, cultural eradication, and religious persecution. Their allegiance was born out of necessity, not ideological alignment with a regime of terror.

The Orthodox involvement in these conflicts was largely a pragmatic and defensive choice—an act of self-preservation during a time when chaos reigned and survival was uncertain. Many Orthodox Serbs, faced with the brutal onslaught of communist forces and the threat of extermination, stood firm with the pro-Chetnik movement not out of allegiance

to ideology but because they felt they had no other option. Their support was rooted in the instinct to defend their homeland, their families, and their faith against external forces bent on destruction.

It's vital that we recognize the influence of the Bolsheviks and their revolutionary agenda in shaping the involvement of Orthodox communities. The Bolsheviks aimed to dismantle traditional social, religious, and national structures—targeting those who resisted their vision of a global communist utopia. For many Orthodox Serbs, aligning with the Chetniks was a defensive response—standing against an existential threat that sought to erase their identity and spirituality—rather than an endorsement of violence or brutality.

For many Orthodox Serbs, supporting the pro-Chetnik cause was not merely about loyalty to a political faction but about defending their very existence. They saw their homeland, their families, and their faith as inseparable, and they believed that standing firm was the only way to resist the destructive forces arrayed against them. This was a collective act of resilience—an effort to preserve their way of life in the face of overwhelming odds and external aggression.

To truly understand this complex history, we must go beyond superficial labels and simplistic narratives. We need to analyze the broader context—war, occupation, ideological conflict, foreign interference, and internal divisions—that created the environment in which these decisions were made. Only by doing so can we gain a truthful and comprehensive understanding of the motives, actions, and struggles of all involved.

It is of utmost importance that we confront and acknowledge the full, unvarnished history of the NDH—warts and all—so that we can shed the propaganda, the myths, and the

distortions that have clouded our view for so long. Only through honesty and openness can we hope to understand their actions in the context of a brutal and chaotic era—an era marked by violence, betrayal, and survival.

The mainstream portrayal of the NDH has often been one-sided, designed to vilify and shame without offering the full story. This narrative leaves no room for nuance or understanding, instead fostering hatred and division. To move forward, we must examine the circumstances, the threats, and the fears that influenced decisions—fears that many of those involved experienced firsthand—so that we can see their actions in a clearer, more honest light.

Dismissing the NDH as nothing more than a villainous regime is a dangerous oversimplification that ignores the reality of a nation under siege. They were a people fighting for their very existence—surrounded by enemies on all sides, internal divisions, and external pressures. Their story is one of tragedy and resilience, not just of evil deeds. Recognizing this complexity is essential if we are to learn from history rather than repeat its darkest chapters.

Acknowledging these truths does not mean excusing atrocities or violence; rather, it means seeking a complete understanding that recognizes the human suffering and difficult choices involved. Only by doing so can we move towards healing, reconciliation, and a genuine appreciation of the multifaceted nature of this history—an essential step if we hope to build bridges where division has long prevailed.

The path to true reconciliation begins with truth. We must shed the distortions, confront uncomfortable realities, and embrace a narrative that respects all sides—one rooted in honesty and compassion. Only then can we foster understanding

among communities that have been divided by propaganda, prejudice, and misrepresentation for generations.

This book is an invitation—a call to see the history of the NDH with clear, unfiltered eyes. It urges us to understand the motives behind their actions, to recognize the hardships faced by all involved, and to confront the uncomfortable truths that mainstream histories often ignore. Only by doing so can we hope to grasp the full scope of this tragic chapter and perhaps, one day, foster true understanding and respect among all the descendants of this tumultuous land.

Chapter I

Understanding the Origins of Yugoslavia

The Historical Link Between Croatia & Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina stand historically and politically as an integral part of the Croatian body politic. Throughout the centuries, since the establishment of the Croatian state in the Middle Ages, these regions have represented the very focal point of Croatian state thought and national aspiration.

The river Drina is recognized as Croatia's ancient, eastern border. During the era of the independent Croatian-Bosnian kingdom, exceptionally strong political ties bound Bosnia and Herzegovina intrinsically with the rest of Croatia. The subsequent separate status of these two provinces from the main Croatian state organism was an anomaly that occurred only during the age of Turkish power in Europe. Prior to this, Bosnia and Herzegovina were not incorporated into any other South Slav state; their existence was uniquely tied to the Croatian national framework.

In a display of profound indifference to the geopolitical and ethnic significance of these areas, the Ottoman Empire administratively assigned all the Croatian lands they conquered to the province of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Crucially, at the outset of Ottoman influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the area was demographically distinct. There were no Serbs or Orthodox populations present at all. The inhabitants were exclusively Catholic Croats and the so-called "Bogomiles." The Bogomiles were members of a distinct religious sect that had emerged as a result of a major ecclesiastical dispute within the Croatian state during the time of the national rulers, centered on

the question of maintaining a national Slavic liturgy versus adopting the Latin Church.

The arrival of the Ottomans precipitated a dramatic change in the ecclesiastical and religious composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bogomile Croats, en masse, converted to Islam immediately. However, this conversion to Islam did not erode the essential characteristics of their belonging to the Croatian national body.

The Croatian people bore tremendous blood sacrifices in their efforts to defend Bosnia and Herzegovina against the relentless Turkish incursions. A significant portion of the Catholic Croatian population was forced to flee their ancestral homes. Retreating in the face of the unequal struggle, they migrated to coastal Croatia, the islands, northern Croatia, and further afield into the Hungarian region, even reaching distant lands such as Bohemia, Moravia, and Bavaria.

Following the occupation of Bosnia, a considerable number of the Orthodox, so-called Wallachian elements were introduced into the area from the central Balkans, accompanying the Ottoman troops. This influx marked the beginning of the Orthodox Church's establishment within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Given the Ottomans' ongoing conflict with Catholic Europe (epitomized by the Roman Pope and the German Emperor's leadership against the Turkish advance into the heart of the continent), the occupiers naturally showed a far greater degree of tolerance toward Orthodox Christianity (Pravoslavism). This disparity in treatment led to the persecution of Catholic Croats. Consequently, a large number of Catholic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina gradually converted to Pravoslavism to escape persecution, and in certain regions, the Catholic priesthood was completely decimated.

This historical process resulted in the Pravo-Slavic element becoming the third numerically strongest factor in these two historically Croatian provinces, alongside the established Muslim Croats and Catholic Croats.

Among only a smaller segment of the Pravo-Slavs in this area of Croatia, a distinct Serbian national consciousness began to emerge late, specifically in the second half of the 19th century. These efforts were underpinned by the Greater Serbian expansionist plan, which was strongly supported by Pravo-Slavic Russia. Russia sought to leverage Pravo-Slavism in southeastern Europe as a strategic tool for its imperialist Balkan policy. Thus, alongside the established Pravo-Slavic Croats, self-identified Pravo-Slavic Serbs suddenly appeared on Croatian national and historical territory.

Propaganda efforts by Serbia across Europe falsely claimed that Bosnia and Herzegovina were inherently Serbian provinces. This narrative permeated the chauvinistic historiography produced by Serbian authors in Belgrade, a movement that regrettably found support among certain Russian, French, and English historians.

Lacking national freedom and an independent state at that time, the Croatian people were severely hampered in their ability to effectively counter this persistent and aggressive propaganda. Nevertheless, the Croatian nation always maintained a profound and unwavering awareness of its indisputable and ancient right to these provinces.

The European powers made a correct and essential decision at the Berlin Congress in 1877 by liberating Bosnia and Herzegovina from Turkish rule. However, the singular critical shortcoming of this otherwise momentous step was that within the administration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the long-overdue political union of these two Croatian provinces

with the three Croatian kingdoms (Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia) was tragically not carried out.

The Fate of Stjepan Radić

The assassination of Stjepan Radić, the iconic leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka, HSS), in 1928 stands as the single most destabilizing event in the early history of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This act of political murder, carried out by a Serb deputy inside the halls of the Yugoslav Parliament, was far more than a tragedy; it was a profound failure of the democratic project that the kingdom purported to uphold. It shattered the already tenuous trust between Croat and Serb political representatives, extinguishing the hope for a negotiated, federal future and directly precipitating the imposition of a royal dictatorship by King Alexander I.

The Croatian Peasant Party, which Radić had co-founded in 1904, was indisputably the most significant political force in Croatia during this turbulent interwar period. Its power was rooted in its deep connection to the Croatian populace, particularly the rural majority. The HSS was not merely a political faction but a national movement, successfully uniting agrarian interests with the profound desire for greater Croatian political autonomy and social justice, all while fundamentally challenging the highly centralized and increasingly Serb-dominated governmental structure of the newly formed South Slav state.

At the very heart of the HSS's political platform was the ideology of agrarianism, a commitment dedicated to the economic and social welfare of the vast peasant and rural communities that made up the backbone of Croatian society. The party was a relentless and powerful advocate for sweeping land reform, explicitly aiming to dismantle large, often historically

non-Croatian, estates and redistribute the land to working farmers. Furthermore, they tirelessly pursued economic policies designed to ensure fair market prices for agricultural products, promote modern farming techniques, and significantly improve the overall standard of living for rural populations who felt distinctly marginalized by the central government in Belgrade.

Another central pillar of the HSS's mission was the fierce defense of the unique Croatian cultural and linguistic identity. Radić and the party leadership recognized the centralizing policies emanating from the capital as a deliberate, thinly veiled attempt to forge a unitary "Yugoslav" nation, which they correctly perceived as an effort to diminish or outright assimilate the distinctiveness of the Croatian people. Consequently, the HSS made it a primary goal to protect Croatian institutions, safeguard their language, and preserve the historical and cultural heritage that fundamentally defined their national identity.

Politically, the ultimate objective of the Croatian Peasant Party was to secure meaningful and substantive autonomy for Croatia within a restructured Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They were vehemently opposed to the highly centralized model of the state established by the 1921 constitution. Radić passionately argued for a vision of a truly federal or confederal state structure. Such a structure would have empowered regional self-governance, formally recognized the political and historical distinctiveness of the Croats, and, crucially, ensured that Croatian interests were no longer perpetually subservient to the entrenched power of the Serbian political elite.

The HSS's commitment to political action was characterized by a distinct strategy that married democratic principles with a firm and uncompromising opposition to

authoritarianism. The party championed the foundational principles of democracy, continually demanding free and fair elections, robust respect for civil liberties, and a dramatic expansion of citizens' rights to fully participate in the political process. Their aim was to empower the common citizen, especially the rural peasant, to actively shape government policy and hold the ruling authorities accountable for their actions.

In the face of escalating political repression, systematic censorship, and the ever-present threat of violence—a threat that tragically culminated in Radić's 1928 assassination—the HSS, under its leader's moral guidance, consistently promoted a path of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience. Radić's philosophy was profoundly rooted in the power of peaceful protest and an unwavering adherence to democratic principles as the only legitimate means to challenge the growing authoritarianism and systematic oppression emanating from the central government, a stance that was both a moral imperative and a strategic bulwark.

Serving as the primary political bulwark against the centralizing policies of the Serbian-dominated government, the HSS actively and vociferously fought against any legislative or administrative measures designed to diminish Croatian political autonomy or suppress regional identities. They viewed such centralizing efforts as a direct and unacceptable attack on the fundamental rights and the distinct national identity of the Croatian people, representing a constant battle to secure their political survival.

Beyond its core political and agrarian focus, the HSS was a vocal and powerful champion of social justice and equality for all citizens. Stjepan Radić and the party leadership stressed the moral obligation of the state to address profound social inequalities and provide robust support for vulnerable

populations. The HSS consistently advocated for stronger protections for workers' rights, emphasized welfare policies designed to improve the well-being of all citizens, and worked tirelessly to ensure that the progress of the state benefited not just the urban elites but also the often-neglected rural and working classes.

In summary, the Croatian Peasant Party transcended the definition of a mere political organization; it represented a nationwide effort to fundamentally redefine the very nature of the Yugoslav state. It fought for democratic values, genuine federalism, and the dignity and political rights of the Croatian people. However, Radić's assassination tragically signaled the failure of peaceful dialogue and hastened the descent of the Kingdom into a period of harsh authoritarianism, an event that profoundly and irrevocably altered the trajectory of Croat-Serb relations and the history of the region for decades.

The Reign of King Alexander I

The Royal Dictatorship of King Alexander I, often referred to as the 6 January Dictatorship, began in 1929 as a desperate measure to confront the escalating ethnic and political fragmentation that jeopardized the very existence of the newly unified Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This bold, unilateral action by the monarch involved the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of the democratic constitution, establishing a direct royal rule intended to forcibly forge a centralized and unified Yugoslav identity out of disparate South Slav peoples.

King Alexander I viewed the parliamentary system as dysfunctional, paralyzed by ethnic squabbles, and incapable of governing. The political crisis reached a tragic peak with the 1928 assassination of Stjepan Radić, the influential leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, on the floor of the Assembly. This event made the continuation of normal political life untenable and provided the impetus for the King to assume absolute power, believing that only a centralized, authoritarian regime could save the state from collapse.

A foundational policy of the dictatorship was the radical centralization of governmental authority. All regional forms of political expression or self-governance were deemed threats to the unitary state concept. The regime aggressively moved to consolidate power in Belgrade, stripping local and provincial bodies of meaningful authority and ensuring that all major decisions emanated directly from the King and his handpicked administration.

The most visible and immediate action of the dictatorship was the comprehensive and outright banning of all political parties. King Alexander I blamed these organizations

for fostering division and ethnic polarization, arguing that they were the primary source of the nation's instability. This ban was applied universally, criminalizing the activities of major political forces across the entire kingdom.

The Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), under the legacy of the recently assassinated Stjepan Radić, was a principal target. The HSS was a massively popular and influential force that consistently advocated for Croatian autonomy and represented the agrarian majority in Croatia. Its mass appeal and its direct challenge to the centralizing agenda made it the most significant democratic obstacle to the new royal regime.

Similarly targeted was the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (HRS). This party not only sought Croatian autonomy but also fundamentally opposed the monarchical structure of the state, advocating for the establishment of a republic. Its republican and pro-self-governance ideals ensured its prompt dissolution under the highly centralized and fiercely royalist dictatorship.

Even less radical groups, such as the Croatian Federalist Peasant Party, which sought a compromise through a federalist structure granting substantial autonomy to Croatia, were deemed unacceptable. The dictatorship’s absolute commitment to centralization meant that any form of regional self-governance was viewed as a direct challenge and thus targeted for suppression.

The maintenance of the 6 January Dictatorship relied heavily on an extensive and brutally effective system of state-sanctioned violence and pervasive instruments of control. The military, police, and a restructured state security apparatus were the primary tools used to enforce the King's will and quell any form of dissent.

The regime systematically focused its repressive energies on key opposition figures, political activists, intellectuals, and any dissidents who voiced criticism of the government's policies or the King's authority. Opponents faced immediate and severe consequences, including widespread arbitrary arrests, prolonged imprisonment often in harsh conditions, and relentless harassment by state authorities and the secret police.

A core feature of the dictatorship was its zero-tolerance policy toward public dissent. Security forces, which included heavily deployed military units, were instructed to violently suppress protests, public demonstrations, and labor strikes that challenged the government. These crackdowns frequently resulted in high-profile instances of brutality, severe injuries, and the mass arrest of participants.

High-profile political assassinations were a defining characteristic of the violent atmosphere. The regime either directly carried out or tacitly supported the elimination of significant political opponents. The earlier assassination of Stjepan Radić served as a potent example, removing the most powerful democratic voice advocating for Croatian autonomy just before the dictatorship was formally declared.

Beyond the major political parties, the dictatorship specifically targeted and outlawed any nationalist movements, organizations, or cultural associations that could potentially undermine the unitary, centralizing policies of the monarchy. Groups advocating for separate Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, or Macedonian identities were suppressed, as the regime’s explicit goal was the forced homogenization into a singular Yugoslav national identity.

The concept of pervasive state terror was fundamental to the regime’s stability. The government relied heavily on the

strategic use of state-sanctioned violence as a tool for mass intimidation, aiming to preemptively silence potential opposition through fear. This was accomplished through the frequent deployment of extrajudicial killings, murders carried out without legal process or trial.

Arbitrary arrests—detentions without proper warrant or just cause—were widespread and utilized to disrupt political organizing and instill constant uncertainty among the populace. The police and military forces operated with nearly total impunity, empowered by the emergency authority granted to them under the King's absolute rule.

These combined instruments of violent repression and centralized authority fundamentally restructured the state, transforming the nascent democratic experiment into an authoritarian regime. The 6 January Dictatorship prioritized the physical and political unity of the state above all else, attempting to secure the future of Yugoslavia through suppression and force. Ultimately, the dictatorship failed to achieve lasting stability, as its violent policies only exacerbated the underlying ethnic tensions they were designed to suppress, leading to further radicalization and ultimately contributing to the country's collapse in the following decades.

Chapter II

The Polarizing Plague

The Serbian Virus and Balkinization of the Kingdoms within the Greater Serbian State

Greater Serb propaganda in Bosnia and Herzegovina became a widespread and pervasive force during the period of the Austro-Hungarian administration, laying the ideological groundwork for future expansionist aims.

However, with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—subsequently renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—into which Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated, this propaganda reached its zenith. The Serbian government, operating from Belgrade, marshaled all its resources and political will to aggressively pursue a policy of national assimilation. This involved an intensive and systematic effort to convert the Pravoslavs (Orthodox Christians) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the other Croatian territories (which were considered by Belgrade to be part of an undivided Greater Serbia) into ethnic Serbs. Crucially, the policy also aimed to imprint an even stronger Serbian demographic and cultural character onto these historically Croatian provinces through a deliberate strategy of Serbian settlement, particularly in key geographic areas.

For a full twenty-three years, all the levers of state power and financial resources, centralized in Belgrade, were exploited to achieve this goal. This nationalizing project was backed by the most ruthless political and economic pressure, which was not limited to the Catholic and Muslim Croatian elements but also exerted upon the entire population.

Ironically, the heavy-handed and discriminatory nature of Serbian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the sense of shared national identity

and unity between the Muslim and Catholic Croats, who felt equally targeted by Belgrade's policies. Conversely, among the native Pravo-Slavic (Orthodox) minority, this period brought about a stark political division. A smaller, yet politically active and highly influential, segment of the Pravo-Slavs willingly embraced and became the principal local exponents of the aggressive Greater Serbian idea.

This specific Pravo-Slavic group was predominantly composed of individuals whose social standing and material existence were directly or indirectly dependent upon the functioning and political ethos of the former Yugoslav state. This included state officials at various levels who enjoyed privileged positions, as well as a distinct category of "patriots" who leveraged their involvement in the notorious Chetnik or similar paramilitary organizations. These organizations were instrumental in performing various acts of lawlessness and political pressure, for which their members were often compensated or protected at the expense of the other constituent peoples of Yugoslavia.

This Pravo-Slavic vanguard, deeply permeated by a political megalomania and expansionist zeal that was arguably unparalleled in the region, transformed into the spearhead of the fight aimed at dismantling the independent Croatian state idea and Croatian national integrity.

Throughout the two decades of the existence of Greater Serbian Yugoslavia, Belgrade meticulously executed a well-conceived and long-term plan. This plan was designed to systematically weaken the Croatian people on their ancient national territory. The initial phase was calculated to render them incapable of mounting effective resistance to the Greater Serbian state structure and ideology. The ultimate goal, however,

was to make them completely powerless and therefore unable to establish or sustain their own sovereign state.

A critical component of this strategy involved the systematic settlement of Serbs in the strategically vital region of northeastern Croatia, known historically as Slavonian Croatia. By engineering a demographic shift in this area, the goal was to push the effective Croatian national border significantly further to the west, thereby annexing substantial, fertile, and historically Croatian territory.

Complementing this demographic engineering was the saturation of the state apparatus. The Serbian bureaucracy, from the highest ministerial ranks down to the lowest local official, systematically flooded all Croatian territories with Serbian personnel. This policy was applied broadly but was exceptionally concentrated in the territories of Slavonian Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, effectively establishing a parallel Serbian administration.

The same insidious policy of colonization was concurrently implemented within the economic sphere, achieved through the systematic inclusion and placement of Serbs in key management and workforce positions within economic enterprises across Croatia, ensuring Serbian control over the financial and industrial lifeblood of the region.

The Role of Yugoslavia in Correspondence to Versailles

The establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was not an organic process arising from the mutual desire of its constituent peoples, but rather a direct geopolitical consequence of the Treaty of Versailles. Its foundation was laid to serve as a cornerstone for the Anglo-French security architecture across Europe, designed explicitly to enforce the political and territorial status quo that concluded the First World War. This state was intended, from its inception, to be a reliable military and political instrument in the service of the victorious powers.

Strategically, the purpose of Yugoslavia was clearly delineated, centered on two primary objectives that aimed to suppress the potential resurgence of Central European powers. First, it was conceived as a formidable defensive barrier, whose very existence was meant to frustrate and preempt any movement by the German people toward genuine liberation, equitable territorial adjustments, or necessary economic development. The victors of the Great War viewed a robust, centralized South Slavic state as essential for permanently neutralizing any future threat posed by a revived German power.

Simultaneously, the new kingdom played a critical role in the policy of encirclement directed against Italy. Yugoslavia formed a vital, solid link in the chain of alliances and territorial settlements that were systematically designed to constrict the natural expansion, legitimate influence, and access to resources required by the Italian people in the aftermath of the war. This dual containment policy defined Yugoslavia's strategic utility to London and Paris.

This overarching framework ensured that the structural reality of the new state was, despite its nominal Pan-Slavic ideology, that of an enlarged Serbia. The framework was meticulously maintained to guarantee the disproportionate political, military, and cultural ascendancy of the Serbs throughout this strategically crucial and geographically significant region of the continent. The kingdom was, in essence, a vehicle for Serbian dominance.

The maintenance of this centralizing political direction was a concerted effort that spanned the core institutions of Serbian society. Within the political sphere, a striking consensus existed, where all major Serbian political parties uniformly educated the populace in the spirit of this dominant, centralizing ideology. There was virtually no mainstream political dissent against the vision of a Serb-led, unified South Slav state.

Alongside the secular political establishment, the Serbian Pravo-Slavic (Orthodox) Church played an equally pivotal and pervasive role. The Church provided the essential moral and spiritual sanction for this national and state ideology, lending it an almost divine justification. The confluence of political and religious authority ensured the deep internalization of the state's centralizing mission.

This collective education drew heavily upon the eventual, though largely accidental, victory of the First World War—an outcome that proved extraordinarily beneficial for the Serbian national project. However, the subsequent ideological construction was built upon what were ultimately false theories and mistaken conclusions regarding the nature of the victory and Serbia's role in the world.

Under the powerful sway of these political and spiritual forces, the Serbian people were regrettably led to lose a truly objective, realistic, and constructive view of their own

long-term national interest. They became detached from a pragmatic assessment of the greater forces of political and social evolution that were inexorably shaping Europe and the wider world in the interwar period.

As a direct consequence of these pervasive nationalist and state currents, the Serbian people collectively suffered a critical loss of political and psychological balance. This imbalance tragically resulted in a profound miscalculation concerning both the limits of their national vocation and the actual measure of their true political and military strength relative to surrounding nations.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that powerful external forces were actively engaged in shaping and orienting Serbian political sentiment toward antagonism. The movements of Judaism and Freemasonry, along with the vast press networks and other means of public propaganda dependent upon them, were instrumental in forging Serbian public opinion in a distinctly hostile direction.

These forces effectively maneuvered the Serbian nation into the hostile camp of the enemies of European unity and progress. By doing so, they positioned Serbia as an implacable opponent of the peaceful, cooperative political and social development that the inexorable spirit of the time was demanding across the entire European continent as a path out of past rivalries.

Within the Serbian intelligentsia, the tragedy lay in the almost impossibly small number of individuals who managed to maintain a divergent and objective view of the true course of events unfolding around them. These few sought a desperate, alternative path, attempting to employ a policy of "gaining time" (a diplomatic holding action) primarily to safeguard and preserve the immediate territorial and political achievements

that had been secured for the Serbian people during the 1914–1918 war.

Historically, Serbian foreign policy had been almost exclusively modeled upon, and often served the direct, strategic interests of, Pravo-Slavic Russia. Serbia effectively acted as Russia's principal agent and instrument of influence in the turbulent southeast of Europe. It was this faithful adherence to Russian policy, and the resulting pan-Slavic tension, that famously provided the first spark that directly led to the outbreak of the First World War. In the contemporary context, reflecting Belgrade's abiding obligation to Great Britain—the primary and last remaining guarantor of the fragile Versailles order—Serbian policy continued to be heavily directed, both politically and spiritually, toward Moscow, having maintained an orientation toward Russia as the ideological anchor.

The Bolshevization of Yugoslavia Following the Great War

The seeds of communism were deeply sown in Serbia, and particularly in its capital, Belgrade, well before the fracturing of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This nascent communist movement found fertile ground in the unique socio-economic and political landscape of the interwar period.

In a society where, for the majority, life was characterized by relentless, arduous labor, and where wealth—or mere subsistence—was primarily a matter of meeting the most pressing necessities, the populace was ripe for radical politicization. This environment fostered a romanticized, almost fearless embrace of historical ideology that transcended the mundane struggles of daily life.

Crucially, the political orientation of Serbian Pravo-Slavism (Orthodoxy) played a significant, and arguably non-ecclesiastical, role in this development. Unlike the spiritual focus of Orthodoxy in many other regions, the Serbian iteration had increasingly become a political instrument, fostering a deep-seated, historic connection with Russia. This geopolitical and ideological affinity created an open door for the dissemination of communist thought. The area became particularly susceptible because the established Serbian intellectual class was widely perceived as stagnant and incapable of fostering meaningful cultural or creative development. Simultaneously, the internal structure of Serbian society—characterized by a nascent capitalism and a bourgeois class—was seen by many as economically exploiting the vast, working masses. This stark contrast between intellectual

sterility, political corruption, and economic disparity provided a compelling narrative for the communist ideology.

The maintenance of this underlying mentality—a blend of nationalistic ties to Russia, economic discontent, and disillusionment with the ruling elite—provided steady support for radical movements throughout the entire period from the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 to the German invasion in 1941. The endemic corruption that plagued the public and political spheres inadvertently favored the Bolshevik cause, allowing it to take root and flourish within Serbia.

By the eve of Yugoslavia's collapse and subsequent entry into the European conflict, the intellectual future of the nation, the Serbian university youth, was almost entirely under the ideological influence of Moscow. This pervasive and deeply ingrained communist sentiment was a crucial element of the internal situation in Serbia when its political leadership made the fateful decision to stand against the greater European powers.

Given this historical context—the profound economic exploitation, the deeply politicized national church, the ideological bond with Russia, and the widespread communist mobilization—it is unsurprising that a significant segment of the Serbian population held a distinctly antagonistic view toward the Croatian people and the renewed declaration of Croatian statehood during the ensuing conflict. The internal ideological battle had already been won by forces whose world-view was fundamentally opposed to the existing order and the aspirations of their neighbors.

Chapter III

A Regional Resentment

The Maturation of Croatian Political Thought

From the very inception of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—later Yugoslavia—following the devastating conclusion of the First World War in 1918, the Croatian nation found itself fundamentally opposed to the new order. Like many other forces across Europe who viewed the post-war settlement as inherently unjust, unsustainable, and imposed, the Croatian people could not reconcile themselves to the unbearable and unjustified political structure that had been forcefully established. This newly created state, dominated by Serbian centralism and perceived as a violation of Croatian national rights and historical statehood, became a cauldron of political and social discontent.

The years immediately succeeding the war were pivotal for the national and social awakening of the Croatian people. Under the charismatic and principled leadership of Stjepan Radić, the deceased leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka, HSS), the national identity matured rapidly. Radić championed a vision of an autonomous Croatia, fundamentally rejecting the centralized, Belgrade-controlled system. His political program, which resonated deeply with the vast majority of the Croatian populace, particularly the peasantry, emphasized democratic principles and the right to national self-determination.

However, this democratic and peaceful movement for reform, which sought to transform the centralized kingdom into a genuine federation or achieve full independence, was repeatedly met with repression and violent opposition from the regime in Belgrade. This confrontation ultimately culminated in

the assassination of Stjepan Radić and other key Croatian deputies in the Belgrade Parliament in 1928, an event that irrevocably shattered the trust between Croats and the centralized state and marked the death of Croatian faith in peaceful political evolution within the Yugoslav framework.

This period of intense national and political strife occurred under the powerful, if geographically distant, influence of the two great revolutionary movements reshaping the European continent: the Italian Fascists and the German National Socialists. These movements, with their trailblazing ideologies, emphasis on national unity, and rejection of liberal democracy and the post-1918 status quo, provided a stark alternative model for political organization and national liberation. The Croatian people, enduring what they perceived as a foreign occupation and continuous political persecution, found themselves increasingly drawn toward revolutionary solutions, influenced by the transformative energy of these European movements.

The assassination of Radić and the subsequent imposition of the royal dictatorship by King Alexander I in 1929 solidified the conviction among a faction of Croatian nationalists that only an armed, revolutionary struggle could secure Croatian independence. This belief led to the emergence of the revolutionary Ustaše movement—Croatian Revolutionary Organization (Ustaša—Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija)—led by Ante Pavelić.

Pavelić and the Ustaše, adopting an explicitly totalitarian, fiercely nationalist, and anti-Yugoslav ideology, positioned themselves unequivocally on the side of the Axis powers. This momentous decision—to align with Germany and Italy—was taken with full awareness of its far-reaching consequences. The Ustaše leadership was profoundly convinced

of the fateful historical role that the Fascist and National Socialist revolutions were destined to play in reshaping Europe. They viewed their own movement, the Ustaše revolution, as a parallel national liberation struggle, one that matured in the crucible of this broader European revolutionary context.

Consequently, as the geopolitical crisis of the late 1930s escalated into global war, the Croatian people, under the revolutionary banner of the Ustaše, entered the year 1941 with a sense of peace of mind and determined resolution. This tranquility stemmed from the conviction that the long-sought goal of an independent Croatian state was finally within reach, an opportunity created by the disintegration of the Yugoslav Kingdom under the pressure of the Axis invasion. This resolve persisted despite the constant and relentless attempts by the Belgrade regime and its political and media apparatus to destabilize and undermine the Croatian national movement for freedom.

The campaign for Croatian national freedom faced determined opposition, not only from Serbian centralist elements within the Belgrade media who sought to weaken and fracture the Croatian will, but also from the growing force of Communist propaganda operating within Croatia itself. The Communists aimed to harness the widespread social and economic grievances of the populace to fuel their own revolutionary agenda.

Yet, despite the difficult and often desperate economic conditions prevailing throughout the Croatian countryside—conditions exacerbated by the global Great Depression and chronic underdevelopment within the Yugoslav state—Communist agitation failed to gain significant traction. During these years, when the Croatian people faced severe hardship and, in some regions, had to be saved from literal starvation due to food shortages, the Communist Party's message

did not secure the desired ground among the poorest segments of the Croatian population, both in the agrarian regions and in the urban centers. The national imperative for independence, driven by the Ustaše and Croatian Peasant Party influence, proved a far more potent mobilizing force than the class-based revolutionary appeal of the Communists.

During the crucial period of the April War in 1941, which resulted in the swift collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the conduct of the Croatian populace within the territory of the nascent state was notable for its distinct lack of hostility towards the advancing Axis forces. Specifically, in the Croatian parts of the former Yugoslavia, not a single shot was fired by Croatian hands at the soldiers of the allied Axis nations—Germany and Italy—or at members of the German ethnic minority (Volksgruppe) residing within Croatian territory. This demonstrated a clear, unified rejection of the collapsing Yugoslav state and an implicit, if not explicit, welcome of the forces that were enabling Croatian statehood.

Conversely, the Croatian population undertook efforts, to the best of its limited capacity, to protect members of the great allied Axis peoples from armed and often vengeful Serbian bands. These bands, often remnants of the defeated Yugoslav Royal Army or paramilitary formations, were frequently engaged in acts of resistance, banditry, and violence against those perceived as collaborating with the new regime, including German and Italian personnel and the Volksdeutsche. This protective stance further highlighted the alignment of the new Croatian state with its Axis patrons.

The Genesis of the Chetnik Movement

The military collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941 was swift and total, a testament to the internal paralysis inflicted by deeply rooted ethnic tensions, most notably the resistance and opposition from the Croatian populace. The resulting defeat demonstrated conclusively that Yugoslavia, as a unified state structure, was fundamentally unsustainable.

Following the rout, the majority of the defeated and disbanded Royal Yugoslav Army's Serbian personnel either surrendered en masse to the victorious Axis powers or scattered. However, a substantial and determined element refused to lay down arms. These remnants, comprising regular army officers and soldiers, sought refuge in the rugged, forested mountain territories encompassing Serbia proper, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, they broke up into smaller, decentralized groups, prepared to execute a pre-existing military doctrine.

The core of this doctrine was the initiation of guerrilla warfare against the German and Italian occupation forces. This plan, conceived in Belgrade prior to the war, hinged on the pre-established Chetnik detachments. These units were not spontaneously formed but were meticulously prepared in advance to serve a pivotal function in the anticipated conflict. As part of this preparation, a segment of the Pravo-Slavic (Orthodox-Serbian) population had already been armed before the invasion, and training camps were secretly established across various strategic areas in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As the Axis occupation solidified, these surviving military and Chetnik groups retreated into their mountain

strongholds, taking with them a significant amount of military equipment. The explicit, overarching strategic goal for utilizing these weapons was twofold:

> **Direct Resistance and Territorial Acquisition:** To engage in the fight against the military occupation forces of the Axis and, critically, to utilize the global conflict—specifically the ongoing Axis war against the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviet Union—as an opportunity. The Chetniks fully believed in the inevitability and credibility of eventual Allied (Anglo-Saxon and Soviet) military intervention against the Axis. Their aim was to seize and hold as much of the former Yugoslav territory as possible during this period of distraction and chaos.
>
> **Impeding Axis Logistics:** To maintain the former Yugoslav territory in an unorganized and chaotic state, rendering it effectively worthless to the great powers of Europe's Axis bloc. A key operational objective was the complete interdiction and closure of the vital transport connections that traversed the former Yugoslav lands, which were crucial for linking Central Europe with Southeastern Europe, particularly important for logistics destined for the Eastern Front.

The mantle of leadership for this nascent rebellious movement, composed of the uncaptured remnants of the Royal Serbian Army, fell to the Serbian officer Draža Mihajlović. His authority was formalized by the exiled Yugoslav government in London. Specifically, following an order from the refugee Simović government, the former King Peter appointed

Mihajlović as a general and the army minister for the government-in-exile. This dual appointment gave Mihajlović's guerrilla action both military and political legitimacy.

Mihajlović's strategic vision and objectives were articulated in a report submitted by his High Command, which detailed the political and military developments in Serbia from the collapse of Yugoslavia up to the end of February 1942. Excerpts from this foundational document, published in the Slovenian newspaper *Pobratim* (Volume II, Number 5), illuminate the initial composition and goals of the resistance: "The resistance, which was overwhelming in Belgrade, spread to the province. In the mountains, fighting groups began to gather. These were units of the former Chetnik organization and groups of the regular Yugoslav army. Gangs of escaped convicts who committed real crimes were also discovered. All groups took up and rolled out the fight against these gangs. All the groups are mainly divided into two: the military Chetnik group and the partisan group. The military Chetnik movement began immediately after the collapse, while the partisans only became more active in the fight after 22 June. In Serbia itself, they limited themselves to organizational work, while they transferred their activities to Bosnia and the Sanjak and focused the fight on the occupying forces... Draža Mihajlović has organized the entire territory of Yugoslavia up to a few people."

Despite his widespread organizational claim, Mihajlović was pragmatic about the immediate application of force. He explicitly refused to engage in large-scale military action within Serbia itself. His rationale was soundly based on strategic and logistical calculations:

Low Chance of Success: He assessed that a premature uprising in Serbia stood no realistic chance

of success against the concentrated German power.

Lack of Strategic Value: He judged that the territory of Serbia did not possess sufficient economic or industrial Axis assets to justify the inevitable bloodshed such an uprising would incur. Crucially, Serbia was not a critical link for communication with the Eastern Front.

Therefore, Mihajlović prioritized a strategy of preserving his forces and maintaining a stable operational base. He sought peace and quiet in Serbia, viewing it as the essential *hinterland*—the secure logistical and organizational rear area—necessary for his effective military operations in the more strategically volatile regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The strategic landscape was irrevocably altered by the emergence and increasing activity of the Partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito, particularly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.

In late August 1941, the Partisans initiated offensive actions in western Serbia on their own initiative. These actions were conducted without consultation with other resistance groups and, significantly, without regard for the prevailing mood or safety of the civilian population. Their aggressive stance made it impossible for Mihajlović to maintain his passive posture in the region.

The rivalry quickly escalated into open conflict. The Partisans began a systematic campaign to destroy the Mihajlović organizations wherever they found them. This aggressive move forced Mihajlović's hand. In order to protect his personnel and, as he claimed, to shield the general population from the Partisans' acts of violence, he decided to engage them militarily.

Despite this burgeoning hostility, a brief and conditional alliance was formed. An agreement was struck between the leadership of the two movements regarding the direction of military action and the administration of occupied territories. This agreement covered the division of war materials (loot) and the organization of the local population, stipulating that both the Chetniks and the Partisans would retain their respective rights and spheres of influence. The key military consensus achieved was to concentrate their combined force on the Bosnian-Herzegovinian part of Croatia. This joint military focus was strategically intended to strike a powerful, two-fold blow against both the German/Italian Axis occupation and its crucial local ally, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

Chapter IV

The Assault Begins

The Chetnik Offensive

The initial blueprint for the Serbian anti-occupation resistance, centered on guerrilla warfare against the German and Italian forces, was fundamentally flawed. This weakness stemmed directly from the ascendance of the Croatian Ustaše movement. The Ustaše, under the iron-fisted leadership of Ante Pavelić, had gained significant political and military momentum, enjoying the explicit consent and crucial backing of both Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. This geopolitical shift was perceived by the Serbs not merely as a military disadvantage but as an existential threat.

The immediate consequence of these circumstances was a surge of profound anger and resentment among the Serbs, which rapidly metastasized into open violence. This dark chapter of inter-ethnic conflict began with the commission of the first widespread atrocities against the Croatian civilian population residing in southeastern Croatia.

The brutal campaign was launched across the municipality of Čapljina. Over three consecutive days—13, 14, and 15 April 1941—Serbian rebels initiated organized acts of terror. In the villages of Ilići and Gim, within the Mostar district, the brutality reached a horrifying peak on 15 April when eighty houses belonging to Croatian peasants were systematically set ablaze. Beyond those Croatian casualties incurred during the actual fighting against the Yugoslav army (the "Soldateska"), a documented twenty-five Croatian civilians from the villages of Struga, Čapljina, Grabovina, Čeljevo, Radičić, and Međuborje were killed during this three-day massacre.

Further acts of unprovoked violence occurred in Gubela, Trebižat, Gradac, Domanovići, and Plješivac, all part of the Gemcinde (municipality) of Čapljina. Here, the unsuspecting

Croatian populace, engaged in their daily work, was suddenly and lethally ambushed. This was no spontaneous act of rogue soldiers; rather, it was initiated and directed by the Serbian headquarters, serving as the blueprint for the Chetniks' subsequent wartime and peacetime operations. The imperative became clear: establishing fundamental order and security was paramount, even if it necessitated undertaking stringent reprisals against these criminal groups that were actively undermining the highest state and national interests of the newly formed Croatian state.

The core of the initial resistance was formed by scattered detachments of the former Royal Yugoslav Army. These remnants had a primary mission: to continue ambushing and harassing the forces that were allied with the Ustaše in Serbia and Montenegro, and critically, after 10 April 1941, to extend these subversive activities into the newly established territory of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH).

These scattered military units were quickly infiltrated and bolstered by a dedicated group of political agitators. The composition of the NDH's population and administration at the moment of its founding was highly volatile. A substantial number of Serbs held various influential posts within the pre-existing state apparatus. These were the same Serbs who, under the previous regime—a regime that was never a constitutional state—had committed serious offenses against the Croatian people. Their intense animosity toward all things Croatian made them irreconcilable adversaries of the Croatian nation-state from its very inception.

The Serbs' deeply held political convictions and their history of crimes against both Catholic and Muslim Croats made

them acutely aware that the establishment of the NDH signaled the inevitable loss of their positions and influence.

It is a self-evident truth that no nation-state, anywhere in the world, would tolerate avowed enemies of the state and its people within its administration for even a moment. The Croats had exhibited excessive patience, tolerating this situation for far too long until their forbearance was repaid with yet more violence.

Before the Croatian state could even commence the necessary, systematic process of removing this undesirable element from its administrative machinery, the Serbs took decisive pre-emptive action. They abandoned their posts, fleeing into the forests and swelling the ranks of the uncaptured, armed remnants of the Serbian army operating across the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The movement of agitators was also significantly reinforced by a considerable number of Jews. They recognized that the Ustaše-led Croatia marked the definitive end of their long-standing capacity to exploit the Croatian people and any future possibility for their systematic, anti-establishment propaganda. For years, this propaganda had been consistently directed against the feudal interests of the Croatian people and the broader European cause, often in alignment with the political desires and machinations emanating from Belgrade, London, and Moscow.

Furthermore, the agitators secured the backing of individual Serbs who had been deeply engaged in Communist activities within Croatia. The reality was equally stark for them: it was unambiguously clear that their revolutionary activities could not continue in Ustaše Croatia without immediate and severe consequences. The confluence of these disparate, yet equally hostile, elements—Serbian nationalists, former Yugoslav

military personnel, disaffected Jewish groups, and Communists—formed the core of the nascent, and violently anti-Croatian, rebel forces.

Terror from the New Serb-Montenegrin Order

The nascent rebellion that flared in the remote southeastern territories of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) was not an isolated, purely internal phenomenon. It was, instead, systematically reinforced by a steady influx of personnel and matériel from beyond the NDH's eastern borders, drawing enemies of the new Croatian order primarily from the territories of Serbia and Montenegro.

Crucially, the government of the Independent State of Croatia accumulated undeniable evidence confirming that groups originating from Serbia and Montenegro played a decisive, disruptive role in the revolutionary activity throughout 1941 and into the first half of 1942. This period represented a critical vulnerability for the NDH, as the border along the Drina River, separating the state from Serbia, and the border with Montenegro, had not yet been effectively sealed and patrolled. This porous frontier served as a major artery for infiltration.

The insurgents operating within Croatian territory were in constant, urgent communication with external forces, repeatedly seeking aid in the form of crucial weapons and ammunition. Their primary suppliers were the rebel camps established in Serbia, which were controlled by two major factions: the Serbian rebels under the command of the Serbian officer Draža Mihajlović, known as the Chetniks, and the Serbian Communists. The logistical and material support streaming from these and other Serbian camps was instrumental.

It was this steady foreign assistance that provided the fundamental basis for the extraordinary resilience and longevity of the resistance. The Chetnik-Communist collaboration, despite

their ideological differences, was effective in its common goal of disruption. Their ability to secure supplies enabled them to severely destabilize the Croatian State's efforts to establish administrative control and allowed the insurrection to persist for a remarkably protracted period, tying down significant NDH and Axis forces.

Further exacerbating the government's challenges was the profound isolation of significant parts of the population. Large areas, particularly those remote from administrative centers, consisted of villages entirely lacking modern communication infrastructure—no telephone connections, no radio access, and often irregular mail service. This isolation rendered the populace unable to follow the actual developments of the global conflict. In this vacuum of accurate information, outlandish rumors and false narratives took root. There were segments of the population who genuinely believed that Bolshevik armies, having already overrun Romania and Hungary, were firmly established in Serbia and the Independent State of Croatia, and were actively advancing toward Berlin. This dangerous misapprehension fueled the revolutionary spirit and made the task of pacification and consolidation immensely difficult for the new administration.

For the duration of the conflict following the dissolution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the whole of Europe became a witness to a campaign of systematic, brutally irresponsible propaganda orchestrated from London, Washington, and Moscow. The primary objective of this coordinated effort was clear: to ensure that the Serbian people would never reconcile themselves to the concept of a new European order—a European Europe—and that they would actively resist all calls to engage in quiet, productive work within the new political reality.

Almost every radio broadcast emanating from the powerful transmitters of London or Moscow served as a direct and unambiguous incitement to violence. These transmissions were nothing less than an open invitation to the Serbs residing in Serbia proper and to the rebels operating in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia to commit all manner of criminal acts against the new state and its authorities.

In this complete and utter lack of political and moral responsibility, there was a shocking confluence of objectives between disparate political groups. No substantive difference could be discerned between the fugitive politicians taking refuge in London, whose reckless actions had plunged the Serbian people into profound misfortune, and the Bolshevik speakers broadcasting from Moscow, who had historically demonstrated an absolute disregard for the fate of entire peoples.

Even the exiled ex-King Peter II was drawn into this incomprehensible and destructive political activity. Lacking a comprehensive understanding of the situation himself, he was guided by a political circle comprised of individuals explicitly receiving payment from English and Jewish sources. At a time when the Serbian people desperately needed to regain their composure, assess the new reality, and recognize a stable path forward, they were instead subjected to a relentless torrent of propaganda. This campaign, deliberately engineered to provoke disorder, drove them to commit grave criminal acts that ultimately proved damaging not only to the Serbian people's own well-being and future prospects but also to the broader cause of establishing a new, peaceful, and consolidated Europe.

The Warmongerers from Moscow, London, and Washington

The government-in-exile of former King Peter II, based in London, actively encouraged the Serbian population to engage in a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Axis powers—Germany and Italy—and against the newly formed Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH). This policy and activity were maintained not just in the initial chaotic months following the invasion and collapse of Yugoslavia in April 1941, but continued well into the conflict, despite the increasingly evident and often reckless consequences of such a broad appeal for insurgency.

A pivotal moment in this propaganda effort occurred on 1 October 1941, when former King Peter II utilized the London radio broadcasts to issue a direct and fervent call for a general uprising among the Serbian people. The transmission of this royal directive was immediately followed by its readdressing and dissemination in Serbian by the authorized executor, ensuring the message reached its target audience with maximum impact. Crucially, the commander of the Chetnik forces, Draža Mihajlović, took immediate steps to reproduce and circulate the ex-king's appeal widely in the form of a printed leaflet, thereby cementing his own role as the loyal executor of the royal command.

A significant, evocative portion of this inflammatory flier read as follows: "A ruler from whom you have given up the crime shouts through his big fighters at those who have not acted disgracefully and are now in our forests. In battles, blast the Celts of slavery as long as they are not yet stronger than me, because in the near future only those who will sacrifice

everything in this battle will have a right to life. Our mother, the mother of all Slavs, Russia, is leading the fight against our eternal enemy together with the great English and American people for the salvation of humanity and our nation."

The appeal continued with a direct call to action, demanding immediate mobilization and loyalty: "Join the ranks in villages and towns under the leadership of my best, bravest and most legendary men, who are in league with me through their commanders. All combatants aged 17-60 must register for cured ranks. All conscripts who were led away from their homes or evacuated to the enemy camp, as was the case with a certain number of officers and noncommissioned officers, should be viewed as violators of the fatherland. I took the throne in my early youth and took it when I was a minor. There are people in this country who would like to put a knife to my head who I've encountered. At the last moment we freed our men from the burglars, but we soon fell into the slavery that they had prepared for us. In the newly liberated fatherland, I see legendary men who have their worth and their honor today now and immediately in the fight for freedom. You will destroy by my orders, including weapons, ammunition and the rest of what is necessary for the fight. To arms! Sons of great valleys, to the people, for the people, in faith and God for honor and succession, and with the help of our allies, the Russians, English, and Americans! Into the fight against the common enemy!"

This dissemination of war propaganda was not limited to leaflets and radio broadcasts. The insurgents operating within the territories claimed by the Independent State of Croatia were regularly supplied with essential propaganda material and, crucially, logistical support from both London (representing the Western Allies) and Moscow (representing the Soviet Union).

This aid was delivered through multiple channels, including radio transmissions and via aircraft, which were used to drop supplies and messages directly into the operational areas of the rebels.

Evidence of this external support and the burgeoning resistance was noted by enemy authorities. During the peak period of rebellious activity, enemy aircraft, presumably allied resupply or reconnaissance planes, were frequently observed. For instance, the deposition of the Serb Stevo Biljetina, born in 1914 in Donji Lapac and responsible for Ripač in the Bihać district, recorded on 30 July 1941, in Bihać, explicitly stated that "Ten Bolsheviks from Russia with parachutes had settled at Kulen-Vakuf and that they were followed, perhaps by parachutes, by about a hundred machine guns." This testimony highlights the early and direct involvement of Soviet personnel and matériel in the escalating conflict.

The documented evidence of encouragement, propaganda, and material support, channeled through the London government-in-exile and directly from the Soviet Union, unequivocally demonstrates the enormous and controversial responsibility shared by both England and the Soviet Union for the complex and catastrophic events that subsequently unfolded, not only in Serbia but also throughout the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. Their actions served as a primary catalyst for the widespread insurrection and the ensuing brutal civil war and occupation violence that engulfed the region.

Chapter V

From Hatred to Barbarity

The Ruthlessness of the Communist Chetnik Gangs

The rebellion against the nascent Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was a complex and brutally violent affair, spearheaded by a coalition of disparate and often ruthless elements. The core leadership comprised Chetnik commanders—adherents to the Serbian royalist and nationalist agenda—active Serbian officers, the Ulen, and well-known Communists. This unholy alliance, driven by a shared, albeit ideologically divergent, goal of undermining and destroying the Croatian state, unleashed a campaign of terror across the southeastern territories.

Their modus operandi was characterized by stealth, surprise, and sheer brutality. Attacks were typically carried out under the cover of darkness, utilizing surprise and ambush tactics against a range of targets. Croatian villages and vital trading centers were subjected to devastating raids. Military and Ustaše patrols, the symbols of the new state's authority, were mercilessly ambushed and massacred. Even quiet, unarmed pedestrians became victims. Furthermore, the rebels systematically targeted the infrastructure of the state, attacking railways and other means of transport, as well as crucial bridges, crippling communication and commerce.

The sheer volume of these criminal attacks by the Chetniks and Communists plunged southeastern Croatia into a period of profound suffering and trial during the first year of its existence as a free state. In numerous places, both large and small, the barbaric impulses of the rebels were given horrific expression. The resulting wave of violence shattered countless Croatian families, inflicting irreparable harm. Catholic and

Muslim Croats, targeted simply for their identity, were subjected to cruel torture and summary execution.

The full depravity of the rebels' campaign was not limited to murder; it extended to a total war on property and dignity. Houses were systematically burned, and possessions were utterly destroyed. Everything that fell within the grasp of the Chetnik and Communist knife or rifle was systematically slaughtered, a deliberate act of annihilation against the Croatian population.

The atrocities committed against individuals were sickeningly inventive and sadistic. Male victims were beheaded or had their heads smashed; their throats were slit; eyes, ears, and noses were gouged out. Limbs were severed (hands and feet cut off). Skin was flayed from the head and body. Genitals were mutilated. As for the women and children, the breasts of girls and mothers were savagely cut off, and in an act of inadmissible sadism, small children were sometimes placed on the severed breasts. They were slaughtered indiscriminately. Not even infants were spared from this animalistic rampage, with children killed even in their mothers' arms.

The torture methods were designed to inflict maximum pain and terror. People were beaten with poles, roasted in ovens, and subjected to agonizing forms of mutilation: nails were pulled off hands and feet; knives were stabbed under the fingernails; living flesh was sliced from hands; nails were hammered into the soles of the feet; and hearts were cut out with a knife. Victims were often beaten into unconsciousness.

The tragic events in villages such as Pločnilk and Koritnik represent only a fraction of the unprecedented bloodshed the Croatian people were forced to endure. The rebels also specialized in group killings. Victims were typically bound, marched to a pit, murdered with knives or other weapons, and

then unceremoniously dumped into the chasm. The rebels often disposed of their victims by throwing living people into burning houses or burying those who were still half-alive.

In a gruesome display of their political hatred against Germany, Italy, and Croatia, the rebels sometimes carved symbolic letters into the bodies of their tormented and exhausted victims while they were still alive. These symbols included the letter "U," the symbolic sign of the Ustaše movement, or the letter "V" (for Victoria).

The persecution extended equally to the clergy, with both Catholic and Muslim religious figureheads being targeted. Among the documented victims of the Chetniks and Communists are the following Catholic Priests:

Krešimir Barišić, priest in Kinjeuša, Bos District.

Juraj Gospodnetić, priest in Bos. Grahovo, whose own mother was also brutally murdered.

Maks Nestor, priest in Drvar.

Ilja Tomas, priest in Klepac, Stolac district, who was subjected to terrible torture.

Anto Bakula, priest in Gornji Hrasan, Stolac district, whose tongue was cut off by a Communist just before his murder with the accompanying, blasphemous words, "I will now bestow you with the holy sacraments."

Jakov Barišić, priest in Gradac.

Jozo Kaurinović, priest in Prijedor.

Despite such horrific crimes—which were severe enough to cloud the spirit of even the most celestial people—the Croatian people remarkably retained their presence of mind and balance.

The violence was not solely directed at civilians. Countless patrols of the Croatian Landwehr (Home Guard) and Ustaše formations were ambushed and massacred, with a particular focus on targeting officers of the Croatian Landwehr, aiming to decapitate the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia.

Within the first month and a half of the NDH's formation, the scale of Chetnik devastation was staggering. In the Rogatica district alone, the Chetniks systematically set fire to a reported seventy Croatian villages. This campaign of arson and destruction was not limited to Rogatica town but permeated numerous other communities within the district.

The methodology of the atrocities was chillingly consistent and focused on total annihilation. Acts of arson, murder, and looting were rampant, often culminating in the intentional burning of homes with their inhabitants trapped inside. Men, women, and children were locked within their residences and left to burn alive. This deliberate mass murder of the defenseless—children, women, and the elderly—was a widespread pattern of violence throughout the region.

The nature of the murders was marked by extreme barbarity. Accounts detail the systematic infliction of suffering, including the gouging out of eyes, the mutilation of women's and girls' breasts, and the disembowelment of pregnant women.

In the village of Kalinamići, part of the Sokolovići municipality, twelve people were slaughtered. Among the

victims was an eighty-year-old man, Mehaga Hajdarević, demonstrating that age and frailty offered no immunity from the perpetrators' wrath.

A particularly egregious incident occurred in Rogatica itself, where an infirmary—a place designated for the sick and wounded—was attacked, and three hundred helpless patients were murdered by the Chetniks.

As they carried out the executions and massacres, the Chetniks frequently taunted their Muslim victims with political and ideological rhetoric. Shouts such as: "Where are the Croats and Pavelić now? Now call Hitler to help you!" reveal the ethno-religious and political motivation behind the slaughter, linking the victims to the newly established Croatian state and its Axis allies, and framing the violence as a retributive act.

Despite the extremely numerous and widespread attacks against the lives and property of the citizens of the Independent State of Croatia and its nascent armed forces, the Croatian state authorities were characterized as having shown extraordinary patience throughout this initial period. This patience was likely a result of military weakness and a lack of resources to retaliate effectively.

The perpetrators were publicly challenged by the authorities, who condemned the violent acts and highlighted the hopelessness of their objective to hold territory and foment insecurity. However, the violence continued, fueled in part by propaganda emanating from London and Moscow, which sought to exploit the instability of the region.

Ultimately, these acts of violence and terror were not isolated to the NDH; similar atrocities were simultaneously being pursued in occupied Serbia and Montenegro, illustrating a broad and coordinated campaign of violence across the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The Fury of the Revolutionaries in Serbia

The profound psychological state gripping a substantial segment of the Serbian populace following the devastating defeats in the conflicts with Germany, Italy, and the newly-established state of Croatia found ample illumination in the public records of the era, notably the Serbian press and the broadcasts from Belgrade radio. This climate of despair and resentment proved fertile ground for various resistance and paramilitary movements.

Beginning approximately in late September 1941, a disturbing convergence of forces materialized in Serbia. The Chetniks, primarily a royalist and Serbian nationalist movement, and the Communists, dedicated to a revolutionary upheaval, began to operate in sinister coordination. Their ranks were swelled by former prisoners of war and others disenfranchised by the occupation. This unlikely alliance was cemented by shared opposition: they were united against the victorious occupation army, against those Serbs who refused to participate in the Chetniks' destructive and often reckless activities, and against any Serb perceived as cooperating with the German military authorities.

Despite the obvious chasm in their ultimate political and ideological objectives, the rebels, under a loosely controlled but effective joint leadership, ignored their ideological differences and marched together. This period of their joint operation in Serbia and Croatia is perhaps most accurately described as a form of Serbian Bolshevism, characterized by a volatile blend of nationalist fervor and radical communist ideology. The emblems they adopted visually represented this strange synthesis: the Serbian national flag brazenly emblazoned with a red star, and Chetnik caps likewise adorned with the

communist star. Their rallying cries further showcased this duality, a bewildering mix of "Long live King Peter" and the revolutionary chant of "Heil Stalin!" and similar contradictory phrases.

On Croatian territory, the collaboration between the Chetniks and Communists was often more deeply rooted and extended further back. Beyond the mutual hatred for the Axis powers—Germany and Italy—and the Soviet Union's enemies, these two groups were powerfully unified by a fierce, visceral hatred directed squarely at the Croatian people and their newly declared state, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

However, by the close of 1941, the inherent contradictions and power struggles within the insurgency began to manifest, resulting in the first violent conflicts between the Chetniks and Communists on Croatian soil. The more radical, uncompromisingly Bolshevik-Anarchist faction, which had adopted the moniker of "partisans," was strictly adhering to directives originating from Moscow. Their immediate objective shifted to the elimination of the Chetnik-aligned rebel leadership—specifically those elements that had pledged allegiance to Draža Mihailović, whose headquarters was situated in Ravna Gora in Serbia, and who served as the nominal representative of the Serbian royal government in London.

This internal, bloody conflict within the rebel camps ultimately concluded predominantly in favor of the partisans. Their watchwords and promises, heavily tinged with socialist and revolutionary rhetoric, resonated more powerfully and were generally considered more attractive to the majority of the rebels. This appeal was significantly bolstered by a pre-existing Serbian affinity for Moscow and the broader movement of Bolshevism. A strong factor influencing the outcome was the widespread conviction among the bandits that an inevitable,

crushing victory by England, America, and the Soviet Union over the peoples of Europe was on the horizon. This expectation fueled the belief in the eventual triumph of the Soviet Union, or Bolshevism, across the European continent.

During these tumultuous internal disputes, both the Chetnik and Partisan groups relentlessly leveled the most severe accusations against one another before their respective supporters. In doing so, they inadvertently acknowledged and confirmed their own worst acts of violence perpetrated against the Croatian civilian population. Crucially, their reciprocal accusations confirmed the undeniable existence of a coordinated, overarching plan shared by both groups to systematically thwart the expansion and survival of the Independent State of Croatia.

The indisputably established criminal characteristics and actions of the rioters were not merely subjects of rumor; they were meticulously documented in numerous leaflets and propaganda materials in which the groups viciously attacked each other. A particularly chilling example is a pamphlet circulated by the partisan leadership titled, *"The partisans fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina is heartbreaking."*

This leaflet contained serious accusations against the Chetnik forces, claiming they did not cooperate sincerely with the Partisans in their fight. While the Partisans claimed to be engaged in active combat, the Chetniks exploited the distraction to spread into the hinterland, where they engaged in burning and systematic plundering. More damningly, the leaflet espoused that the Chetniks openly called upon the Serbian population to engage in the extermination of Muslims, specifically instructing them to murder them one after the other, and to slaughter women and children, often by brutally throwing them into fires.

Furthermore, evidence emerged that certain Chetnik-controlled settlements became centers of opportunistic looting, with some participating to such an extent that many raids, which even victimized the Serbian population, were considered entirely ineligible for the actual campaign objectives. The Serbian population in the Foča district and other surrounding parts of the region became particularly embittered toward the Chetniks, whom they had initially hailed as liberators, due to the terrible brutalities they subsequently suffered at their hands.

An appeal issued by the top staff of the partisans to the populace of eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina unequivocally demonstrated that the Chetniks, not without reason, were accusing the partisans of equally serious crimes against the Croatian people. In this internal propaganda, the Chetniks—disparagingly labeled "cowards and mercenaries"—were reported to have had the audacity to punish Bosnian farmers, falsely claiming they were constantly "in position" and fighting, while the fighters of the proletarian brigade were supposedly staying in the hinterland, engaging only in looting and murder.

The partisans themselves, despite their public denials, also admitted to having committed crimes. Though for explicit propaganda reasons, they invariably claimed that these acts were committed only in the context of battle with the Croatian State, its official authorities, and the Ustaše militia.

Specific, documented atrocities illustrate the nature of the violence, such as the attack on Prekope. On the night of 5 June 1942, partisan forces launched an assault on the Croatian village of Prekope, situated near Glina. The attack was launched around three o'clock in the morning, resulting in the destruction of twenty-seven farmhouses. The partisans violently attacked the

unarmed inhabitants, throwing bombs into homes and burning the structures down after dousing them with petroleum. They also brutally killed two residents of the village who had been unable to escape to the nearby fields.

Furthermore, the raid on Turkoviće, too, illustrated the nature of the partisans' violence. *The Partisan Newspaper* of 13 May 1942, reported on a criminal partisan attack against the village of Turkoviće near Ogulin, which occurred on 9 May. The partisan leaflet itself described the destruction with cold detachment: "The waterworks were destroyed, the state building, the sawmill and some of the traitors' houses were set on fire." These recorded events stand as stark evidence of the widespread and indiscriminate violence that defined this period of the conflict.

The Revolutionaries Confess Their Crimes

The atrocities committed by the Chetnik forces against the Croatian and Muslim populations are attested even by the accounts of their own leaders. The commander of the Chetnik Communists was forced to concede that the Croatian Muslims residing in their territories had not initiated any violence against the local Pravo-Slavic population. Despite this admission of innocence, the very existence of these peaceful communities was threatened, compelling them to abandon their homes and seek refuge in the unforgiving, rocky recesses of the mountains.

The campaign against the Muslim Croats, whom the Chetnik Communist commander contemptuously labeled as "Turks," was brutal and indiscriminate. Proof exists detailing the systematic murder of Muslim women and children, alongside the deliberate destruction and burning of the homes belonging to Muslim Croats. These acts underscored a deep, unwarranted hatred that extended far beyond military necessity.

The virulent animosity that the Serbian partisans harbored for Ustaše Croatia was quickly and seamlessly transferred to the Chetniks themselves. This dramatic shift occurred as soon as the Chetniks, recognizing the futility and moral error of their initial course, began to signal a potential cessation of hostilities with the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the Croatian people. This realization and subsequent change of heart among some Chetnik elements were met not with understanding, but with redoubled hatred from their former partisan allies.

The internal chaos that engulfed the rebel camp was largely attributable to the partisans, where individuals of Jewish origin gained disproportionate influence and secured key leadership positions. This complete anarchy forced a significant

number of the rebellious Chetniks to confront the disastrous trajectory of the insurgency. Their self-reflection led them to acknowledge the legitimate authority of the Independent State of Croatia, prompting them to recognize its power and return to a peaceful, civilian life. The most hardened and incorrigible elements among the defecting Chetniks, however, chose the opposite path, fleeing from the NDH and joining the ranks of the Partisans.

The newly formed Partisan faction, composed of these zealots, then began to exhibit a venomous hatred for their previous Chetnik allies, a resentment clearly fueled by the Chetniks' earlier rebellious activities.

The nature of the Partisan movement is perhaps best and most damningly revealed in the appeal published on 1 May 1942, by political commissar Miro Popara and the partisan commander Petar Ilić. The leaflet contained a chilling accusation, aimed at demonizing the NDH and those Chetniks who sought peace: "The Ustaše soldiers are walking hand in hand with the primordials of the Serbian people, the Chetniks, with the same Chetnik forces who have massacred thousands of Croatian and Muslim women, children, and old people, with those who burned hundreds of villages and thousands of houses of innocent Croats and Muslims." This propaganda sought to obfuscate the Partisan's own atrocities by highlighting the past crimes of the very Chetnik groups some were now attempting to absorb.

Beyond the political rhetoric, the Partisan leaflets contained explicit instructions for widespread, merciless destruction. They called for the total settlement of accounts with all opponents of the partisans. Furthermore, they directed their followers to destroy essential infrastructure—bridges, roads, telephone, and telegraph facilities—and to cripple the economy

by destroying industrial companies and facilities. In a shocking display of disregard for human life and sustenance, the partisans were also ordered to commit arson to destroy harvests. Futile appeals were also issued to Croatian workers, demanding the complete cessation of all production, which only served to underscore their destructive intent.

During this period, the Partisans utterly forfeited any claim to political legitimacy as an insurgent force. Their decentralized branches devolved into mere criminal gangs of thieves, whose sole motivation became murder, plunder, and destruction for its own sake, seemingly driven by the lowest and most awakened human instincts.

Immersed in a tide of bloodshed and crime, these rebels lost all semblance of mental and moral balance. Through their terrible examples, they revealed once and for all the depths to which a person can sink before being cynically resurrected as a hero of Bolshevik propaganda.

Despite enduring these horrors, the Croatian people exhibited a deep and living resistance—a spiritual fortitude that had sustained them through centuries of adversity. With the timely aid of their allies, they successfully thwarted a grand, insidious plot hatched in London and Moscow. This plan aimed to utilize Croatian territory as a staging ground to perpetually obstruct the unstoppable consolidation of the new, just order emerging in the European southeast.

The Croats finally rose up in a unified front against the twin evils of Anglo-Jewish Imperialism and Bolshevism. These terrible accusations were seen as further undermining the corrupt and vociferous element of the Serbian populace—the same element that had repeatedly led the Serbians to wage war against Europe and had inflicted more than twenty years of persecution, oppression, and humiliation upon the Croatian people, a history

that continued to cast a shadow even in the initial months of their independent state.

Further Atrocities

The systematic murder of the Croatian population by Chetnik forces commenced in the tumultuous atmosphere of April 1941, coinciding with the swift collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the ensuing Axis occupation. These acts of violence were not isolated incidents but represented the brutal initial phase of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

A significant early atrocity occurred between 13, 14, and 15 April 1941, when a Chetnik detachment, formally a part of the regular Serbian army, launched a devastating raid against the Croatian population in and around Čapljina, Herzegovina. The speed and ferocity of the assault caught the inhabitants largely unprepared, forcing many to flee for their lives.

Despite the desperate attempts to escape, the Chetniks successfully hunted down and killed numerous Croats. The following individuals are recorded as having been murdered during these initial three days of terror:

Ilija Rozić-Dragičević
Hasan Jakić
Pavo Mrvalj
Frana Vego
Jakov Pervan
Jure Čuljak
Pero Draganović
Hasan Kavara
Ivan Brajković
Pero Jurilj
Bisera Šarić
Mujo Faslagić
Marko Colić
Mara Mandžini
Jozo Putica
Zada Ramić
Ivan Pavlović
Frano Škegro
Martin Vasilj
Ilija Sušak
Stipan Dragičević
Matija Pehar
Petar Stavun
Stanko Sutalo
Mujo Hasić

The victims were unarmed, and while many managed to escape, reports confirm a substantial number of wounded in addition to the dead, indicating a widespread use of lethal force. The savagery of the attacks was marked by a complete disregard for human life, with neither women nor children being spared.

A particularly harrowing incident unfolded when Chetniks raided the home of Marko Vego in the village of Struge. The account, recorded by Ruža Vego, starkly illustrates the indiscriminate nature of the violence: Frana Vego, Marko's wife, was shot four times in the head while holding her six-month-old child in her arms. Four of their other children were also wounded in the attack.

The campaign of violence continued with equal brutality on 15 April 1941, when Chetnik Communists—a force formed from the remnants of the defeated Serbian army and aided by members of the local Greek Orthodox population—targeted the Croatian villages of Cim and Ilići near Mostar.

These criminal gangs employed not only small arms but also cannon shots and incendiary bombs to execute their attack. Their primary objective was the wholesale destruction of the community, evidenced by the systematic destruction of houses and commercial buildings. Simultaneously with the bombardment and arson, the Chetniks began the massacre of residents who had not managed to hide or flee in time.

The result of this coordinated assault was the complete obliteration of the two Croatian villages. Available reports document that the homes of eighty-five Croatian farmers were set ablaze and destroyed. The destruction consumed the residences of the following individuals, representing a cross-section of the local population:

Ilija Klajaja	Franjo Calo
Ivan Klajaja	Andrija Martić
Tomo Ljubić	Ante Milić
Jure Blažević	Marijan Rosić
Marko Pehar	Ivan Rosić
Stanko Markić	Tradija Knežević
Ahmet Kurabeg	Ivan Knežević
Filip Stojčić	Stipe Mustapić
Nikola Markotić	Ilija Slišković-Suman
Vidak Calo	Božo
Nikola Skoka	Slišković-Suman
Nazo Hamzić	Ivan Slišković-Suman
Božo Jurica	Pero Rosić
Nikola Zadra	Franjo Rosić
Marko Zadra	Franjo Krešić
Slavko Martinović	Ilija Komadina
Luce Witwe	Jure Krešić
Pero Knežević	Ivan Krešić
Ivan Komadina	Stipan Zofko
Marijan Cvitković	Mijo Komadina
Ivan	Ivan Cvitković
Đonkić-Marinović	Ante Džičić
Karlo Giblić	Jure Marijić
Nikola Bubalo	Ante Marijić
Vinko Martinović	Jure Zelenika
Ivan Skok	Stojan Lasić

A chilling first-hand account of the violence was officially recorded on 29 July 1941, in the village of Struga above Čapljina. The statement was provided by applicants Pero Sulić, Mirko Pehar, and Ruža Vego, widow of the deceased Nikola. Ruža Vego's testimony provides gruesome detail regarding the fate of her family: "When we were told that the Chetniks would come to our village, I hid in the house with my deceased sister-in-law and her six children. Two Chetniks then came to the house and slammed the door. I hid in a tub and they didn't notice me, the deceased mother-in-law hid in a corner with the children. While the Chetniks were still at the door, I

heard someone asking what they wanted with the children and women. The one in front of the house answered: Do them all one by one. Then the two of them started shooting dum-dum bullets in front of the door and hit the deceased sister-in-law four times in the head. Four of her children were wounded, but thank God they remained alive. When my sister-in-law was fatally shot, she was holding her six-month-old child in her arms. I don't know what else to say because they then moved into the village to murder and burn."

Chapter VI

More Bloodshed

The Krnjeuša-Vrtoče Bloodbath

The villages of Krnjeuša and Vrtoče, two peaceful Croatian settlements nestled in the western region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, became the unfortunate stage for a gruesome and unprovoked tragedy, a stark example of the criminal campaign waged by the renegade Chetnik Communists. This horrific massacre, which saw the systematic slaughter of the local Croatian inhabitants and the deliberate torching of their homes, occurred without the slightest act of hostility or provocation from the resident population.

The assault began with a sudden, unexpected invasion by the Chetnik Communists on the village of Vrtoče. Their initial act of brutality targeted the esteemed local merchant and innkeeper, Josip Matijević, and nine members of his immediate family. The report chillingly recounts the savage manner of his death: "His head was severed and impaled on a peg, which the perpetrators mockingly wrestled around, while his mutilated torso was contemptuously thrown into a raging fire. The violence that followed was comprehensive; almost every Croat resident in Vrtoče was systematically slaughtered."

On that same dreadful day, the Chetnik Communists moved on to inflict an equally terrible bloodbath upon the Croatian population of the adjacent village, Krnjeuša. This small town, comprised of twelve Catholic households with approximately 80 residents, was utterly devastated. One after the other, these homes were looted, set alight, and reduced to ruin. In a crime of truly horrifying scale, nearly all the inhabitants were murdered.

Following the conclusion of the slaughter in Krnjeuša, the Chetnik Communists performed a symbolic act of defiance and hate. At the site where the majority of the killings took

place, they triumphantly unfurled a red flag—the banner of Bolshevism. As they rallied around it, they shouted and emphasized vile insults directed at Poglavnik (Ante Pavelić), the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), and Adolf Hitler. Their shouts proclaimed that under this red banner, "Serbia would rise and Croatia would disappear." The attacking force was estimated to be around one thousand apostates.

The assault was characterized by a systematic process of destruction: as soon as a house was thoroughly looted, it was immediately set on fire. Those few who managed to survive the initial, brutal turmoil of the attack were captured, bound, and marched to the local school. They were later transported to the forests and subsequently confined in the insurgents' camps located in the neighboring Pravo-Slavic (Orthodox Serbian) villages.

The reign of terror lasted throughout the entire day of Saturday, 2 August, and Sunday, 3 August. During this time, the Chetniks ruthlessly hunted down men, women, and children. The methods of murder varied in their cruelty: some victims were shot outright, while others were thrown alive into deep wells, where they were then shot and the wells hastily filled with earth to bury the evidence and the bodies.

The fate of individuals underscores the profound sadism of the perpetrators. The church foreman, Ivan Matijević, endured a particularly agonizing death. His face was savagely cut up, his fingers were torn off, and he died after terrible suffering. His family was also massacred: his wife, Marija, his sons Karl, aged 20, and Nikola, aged 15, and his daughters Ana, aged 18, Mara, aged 8, and the six-year-old Kulu, were all killed.

The torture inflicted upon the local priest, Krešimir Barić, was perhaps the most monstrous. He was subjected to the

most cruel torments imaginable. The Chetniks tore apart his face and body with a knife, amputated his fingers, nose, and ears, and gouged out his eyes. In a final act of sacrilege and malice, they threw him, still conscious and half-alive, into the church that they had already set ablaze.

When the Croatian military arrived at Krnjeuša, they were confronted with a scene of utter desolation. Among the numerous bodies discovered, many were so mutilated they could not be identified. The most heartbreaking find was the tiny head of a small child, whose identity could not be determined.

The Chetnik Communists also employed deception to lure victims to their deaths. Some residents of Krnjeuša, along with those who had fled to the village from surrounding towns to escape the initial attacks, were taken to the neighboring village of Zelinovac. They were instructed to enter the houses and farm buildings, reassured that no harm would come to them. However, on the very same night, while one group of Chetnik Communists was engaged in slaughtering cattle and celebrating with wild orgies, a second group set fire to all 20 houses. The majority of these unknown prisoners met their end in the flames or were cut down by the bullets of the renegades as they tried to escape. Simultaneously and under the identical horrific circumstances, approximately 15 houses in the small Catholic village of Lastve were also set on fire and destroyed.

In these two Croatian villages, which were reduced to ashes and completely destroyed, the Chetnik Communists murdered an estimated 130 people.

The execution of this comprehensive bloodbath was carried out explicitly under the red flag, a clear declaration that the massacre was conducted under the banner and ideology of Bolshevism. This ideology would subsequently fuel and justify the continuation of severe and horrific devastation in this part of

Croatia. The profound and chilling sadism demonstrated during the slaughter of Krnjeuša and Vrtoče was not an isolated incident but a characteristic feature that would mark all of the Chetnik Communists' later crimes.

The Bloody Days of Horror in Foča

The city of Foča endured a period of profound terror and suffering under the tyrannical occupation of Chetnik-Communist forces, who seized control with the assistance of Chetnik-Communist paramilitary gangs arriving from Serbia and Montenegro. The indigenous Croatian population, alongside other groups, bore the brunt of this horrific episode, experiencing some of the darkest hours in the city's history.

During this brutal occupation, widespread atrocities were committed. A vast number of Croats, Muslims, and Catholics were systematically murdered, and their properties were ruthlessly plundered and looted. The violence and lawlessness that gripped the city were pervasive, fundamentally altering the lives of the non-Serbian populace.

A firsthand account of this harrowing period was officially recorded on 31 December 1941, in Sarajevo. Sevda Hadžić, a Muslim woman born in 1922 in Jabuka, within the Foča district, provided the following sworn statement to the protocol in front of the military district commander, offering a chilling glimpse into the Chetnik rule:

> "Upon the disarmament of our militiamen in Jabuka, I sought refuge in Foča, staying with my aunt. However, shortly after our regular troops withdrew from Foča, the Chetniks descended upon the city. Their arrival was immediately followed by the ominous sound of cannon fire. Simultaneously, church bells began to ring, and I witnessed a torrent of the Pravo-Slavic (Orthodox) population streaming into the city. A celebratory *kolo* dance was performed near the church

throughout the entire day, a stark contrast to the unfolding tragedy.

The immediate aftermath was characterized by systematic looting of Muslim homes and the cold-blooded murder of Muslims. All available sewing machines were confiscated and collected, and workshops were quickly established for the sole purpose of manufacturing clothing, shoes, and linen for the Chetnik fighters. The looting was not limited to the armed Chetniks; local farmers from the surrounding villages enthusiastically participated in the plundering of Muslim houses and shops, carrying away entire wagonloads of stolen goods. During this spree of pillaging, two Pravo-Slavic women were also killed, though the vast majority of victims were Muslim.

Throughout this horrifying period of occupation, not a single Muslim dared to walk openly in the street, lest they be subjected to immediate violence or death. The nights were particularly dreadful. The sound of constant shooting echoed through the city and the surrounding areas all night long, confirming the continued killing of many Muslims.

After five or six days of this oppressive Chetnik rule in Foča, a Chetnik soldier, accompanied by a Pravo-Slavic woman whom my father had dispatched to ensure my safe return home, came for me. I left with three other Muslim girls, carrying my possessions bundled together. We had barely taken a few steps

when we encountered a group of twenty-five Chetniks. They immediately demanded that we accompany them, completely ignoring our guide's repeated pleas to leave us alone.

During this confrontation, our male companion bravely confronted the Chetniks, accusing them of inhumane actions. He passionately defended the honor of the Muslim men, stating that throughout this entire time, no Muslim would have ever come close to dishonoring or harming a Pravo-Slavic woman. These words provoked a violent reaction, and the Chetniks moved to attack our companion with a knife.

We were subsequently taken to a fetch where they intended to search and examine us and our bundles. The Chetniks then falsely accused us, claiming that we women were supplying our people with ammunition and weapons, and thus acting against the Chetnik forces.

It was at this moment of extreme peril that I managed to reach the yard's gate. With a great cry born of pure fear, I flung the gate open and ran for my life. A Chetnik immediately began to chase me, but I managed to hide behind the man who had been sent to guide me home. It was only through his decisive and forceful intervention and energetic behavior that I was ultimately saved from their clutches."

The harrowing account of atrocities committed by the Chetnik Communists in Foča at the close of 1941 was

meticulously documented by Engineer Ragib Kolaković, the administrator of the local forestry office. His detailed report, dispatched to the Vrhbosna metropolitan county, paints a chilling picture of organized violence and systematic persecution against the Muslim population.

The report explicitly pinpoints the escalation beginning on the eve of 5 December. On this day, the Chetnik authorities orchestrated a massive mobilization, forcing the entire Pravo-Slavic population—men aged 16 to 60—to arm themselves. These newly mobilized forces were then directed to move into surrounding villages that had not yet been fully brought under Chetnik control.

The morning of 5 December witnessed a pivotal and inflammatory public meeting. The commander of the Chetnik gangs addressed the assembled district authorities in Foča. In a brazen act of incitement, he publicly accused the Muslim population of having been instrumental in the downfall of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the subsequent establishment of the Croatian state.

This accusation served as the immediate pretext for a wave of executions. The report states that all captured soldiers of the Landwehr (Home Guard), gendarmes, and financiers who had been taken prisoner and who refused to escape—even those who were wounded—were summarily executed.

The violence was not confined to military personnel; it extended ruthlessly to the civilian population, particularly focusing on refugees who had sought safety in Foča. All affected refugees from neighboring areas, including Višegrad, Rogatica, Goražde, Ustikolina, and the surrounding areas of Foča, were brutally killed.

Among the prominent and well-known personalities murdered were:

Mehad Džeba from Džindić.

Smailaga Siljko and his son, **Meho**, both from Osanica.

Mustajbeg Suvalija from Goden.

A report actually noted that it was extraordinarily difficult to identify the names of all the victims from Goražde and Višegrad, which underscored the scale and chaotic nature of the killings.

Following the executions, the Chetniks systematically engaged in widespread looting. All shops were forcibly opened and robbed by the Chetnik forces, after which they were deliberately abandoned and left to the further plunder and pillage of the Pravo-Slavic population. In a more targeted form of robbery, Chetnik patrols specifically sought out and raided the respected Muslim houses, seizing significant amounts of food, money, and other valuables.

The organized violence soon escalated into a campaign of terror within Foča itself. The report describes the terrifying atmosphere as Chetniks, marching in disciplined lines of four, raised orders that led to actions of a general nature. Amidst a growing clamor and scream, the process of extraction and murder of Muslim men in Foča began.

This dragging of victims from their homes and subsequent murder occurred almost every night and continued relentlessly until 21 December. The scale of this nightly terror

was significant, with approximately 50 people being attacked and likely executed in the stadium alone.

The report manages to definitively confirm the deaths of several individuals during this period, including:

Vejsil Ekmetić, a merchant whose shop was subsequently set on fire.

Sulejman Deović, the supervisor of tobacco production in Foča.

Sulejman Deović, a merchant (a separate individual).

Ibro Njuhović, merchant.

Smail Leti, butcher.

Šerif Hadžalić, merchant.

Edhem Isanović, an official of the district court.

Aziz Rašidkadžić, a coffee shop owner.

Avdo Dervišević and his wife, an employee of Varda.

Midhad Muftić, merchant.

Josef Johun, clerk of the Varda.

Ljubo Madunić, director of Varda.

Franjo Rakun with his wife and son.

Hilmo Hadikadić

Mustafa, director of the carpet factory in Jelić.

Esad and Omerbeg Cengić, estate owners.

Manjo Mušan

Jusuf Kukavicu, community guard.

Milan Kunce, officer of the Varda.

Franjo Latal, director of the land registry.

Josip Večerak, locksmith.

Engineer Kolaković's report also includes a section detailing unverified but highly probable additional killings that extended beyond the immediate Foča municipality and into neighboring districts. These victims were reportedly killed in the

districts of Foča, Čajniče, and in areas just outside the city of Foča itself.

The names of these reported casualties include:

Salko Bešlija from Goražda, identified as a former city mayor.

Galib Čapljić, a mayor in Rogatica.

Haidarbeg Batačić from Miljani.

Hivzo Raščić, merchant from Čajniče.

Dedo Šabanović, merchant from Čajnić.

Ismet Rašidkadić from Goražda.

Nedjib Taffo, a surveyor from Foča.

Hasan Čelik from Ustikolina.

Smail Kunovac from Ustikolina.

The report serves as a crucial, early testament to the organized and systematic violence perpetrated by the Chetnik authorities against the Muslim, and other non-Pravo-Slavic, civilian populations in the Foča region during December 1941.

The following Croats, Muslims, and Catholics were killed:

Selim Jusufović
Smail Letić
Meho Manjo
Lojo Saban
Suljo Veović
Džafer Djulagić
Smail Džulagić
Mustafa Sarać
Derviš Mačak
Ethem Isanović
Suljo Hadžialić
Serif Selimović
Alija Selimović
Camil Selmanović
Smajo
Husein Cengić
Muso Bačvić
Aziz
Bačvić
Lojo Bećir
Jusuf Kukavica
Džafer Kurspahić
Mehmed
Saćir Kukavica

Sulfikar Pašić-Sabrija
Muhamed
Ljubo Madunić
Hamid Muftić
Bećir Čengić
Franjo Rakun

The systematic violence and deprivations suffered by the Croatian population began in earnest on a grim day, when, five days after the initial incursions, a general massacre was unleashed upon the Croatian inhabitants. The perpetrators, in a chilling display of organized brutality, claimed they were acting under direct orders from their staff, signaling that these atrocities were not random acts of violence but a coordinated campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Beyond the immediate slaughter, a rampant and thorough pillage of Croatian property ensued. The Chetnik forces displayed a complete disregard for the well-being and possessions of the Croats, targeting both Catholics and Muslims indiscriminately under the banner of Croat identity. This calculated robbery served not only to enrich the aggressors but also to utterly impoverish and demoralize the surviving population.

The depth of the attackers' contempt was laid bare when starving Croats sought basic sustenance. Upon approaching the local commander for some food, they were met with a cruel and absolute refusal. The commander, displaying a chilling lack of humanity, turned them away and mockingly told them to "go to their Pavelić," referencing the leader of the Ustaše regime, a clear indication that the violence was rooted in a deep-seated ethnic and political hatred, and that any aid or mercy would be denied based on their national affiliation.

The Chetnik ambitions were not limited to localized terror; they harbored grander strategic goals, specifically the capture of Sarajevo. To achieve this, they had meticulously laid the groundwork, including arming all their sympathizers within

the town with revolvers. This internal network was crucial to their plan.

The moment their main forces launched the assault on Sarajevo, this internal network of armed Chetniks was activated. A simultaneous uprising occurred within the city, turning Sarajevo into a slaughterhouse. These internal collaborators rose up in rebellion and killed and slaughtered everything in their path, targeting both Croatians, Catholics, and Muslims alike. Their stated, horrifying objective was to eradicate the Turkish and Catholic breeding ground, explicitly defining their campaign as a genocidal act aimed at eliminating entire ethnic and religious groups.

Following the successful siege and capture of Sarajevo, the violence did not abate. Instead, a new wave of executions began, targeting everything that breathed the Croatian spirit. This was surely a campaign of political and cultural annihilation, aimed at wiping out any remaining symbol or proponent of Croatian identity.

The Chetniks made their uncompromising stance clear, declaring that they would not reconcile with the Croats and had resolved the conflict into a stark, existential choice: "us or them." This final statement crystallized the nature of the conflict as one of complete annihilation, where co-existence was deemed impossible.

The devastating scale of the massacres was later documented by Mahmud Z. Pašić, who concluded his statement with a chilling statistical summary. He reported that in the town of Foča alone, "around a thousand men and women lost their lives." The administrative chaos caused by the killings made a complete and immediate directory impossible to create. However, based on the grim testimonies of local farmers, Pašić estimated that the total number of Croats killed in individual

communities throughout the districts was tragically high, approximating a figure of 6,000 to 7,000 men and women. He specifically noted the almost total elimination of the local Catholic population in the town of Foča itself, where 27 Croatian Catholics were killed. In a particularly heinous detail revealing the depth of their depravity, it was reported that the assailants, had concocted a sinister plan: to cook a poisoned soup and force the remaining population to consume it, a final, sickening act of intended mass murder. Pašić felt compelled to conclude his account with the immediate need to roll out the last remaining part of the population—presumably to either save them or to document their final, dire status.

Chapter VII

Lawlessness

The Horrors of the Government in Prijedor

The self-proclaimed partisans, comprised of the remnants of the defeated former Serbian army, a faction of the population of the Greek Orthodox faith influenced by Bolshevist ideology, and various other depraved individuals, perpetrated unspeakable acts of murder and violence against the Croatian population in the region surrounding Prijedor. The scale of this atrocity is still being fully assessed, but initial estimates place the number of Croats murdered in the Prijedor district at a staggering four hundred. The wave of terror included the wholesale burning and systematic looting of numerous Croatian farmers' houses. Many residents were subjected to cruel martyrdom and brutal mistreatment before their deaths.

The violence reached a horrific climax when the partisan gangs breached the city defenses in May 1942, initiating one of the most egregious acts of bloodshed against the Croatian populace and a shocking display of barbarism. For several months prior, the town of Prijedor, perpetually threatened by these Bolshevik-inspired gangs operating from the nearby forested areas, had been valiantly defended by a small, dedicated Croatian armed force.

This garrison, though briefly cut off from the main body of the Croatian Wehrmacht, subsequently found itself overwhelmed by a massive, concentrated assault on its camp. The attackers numbered in the tens of thousands, a vast contingent of bandits mobilized and gathered in the rugged area of the Kozara Mountains. It is a critical distinction that among these attackers, individuals of Croatian origin were almost non-existent, and certainly, none shared a Croatian national sentiment. The intense and bloody campaign against the garrison

lasted for an agonizing sixteen hours, beginning at noon on one day and continuing until 4 p.m. the following day.

The moment the gangs gained entry into Prijedor, they immediately launched a brutal campaign of murder against the Croats and began the systematic destruction of their property. While a definitive, precise count of the Croats who perished within Prijedor itself remains challenging, it is established with certainty that 229 Croats, ranging in age and including both sexes, died as martyrs. The full extent of the material damage inflicted upon the assets of the Croatian population has not yet been fully cataloged, but it is known that over a hundred Croatian homes suffered severe damage from burning, with the destruction particularly targeting farmhouses on the city's outskirts and public buildings.

The murders were often carried out under the cover of night and predominantly took place outside the city boundaries, usually on the remote slopes of the Kozara Mountains. Notorious locations for these massacres included Pašinac near Cirkin-Polje, the village of Božići, and several other small towns dotted throughout the Kozara region. A common thread uniting all those murdered was the severe and inhuman mistreatment they endured before their deaths.

A medical court commission dispatched from Agram (Zagreb) spent several days in Prijedor conducting investigations. Through meticulous on-site inspections and the comprehensive questioning of witnesses, including a large number of captured bandits, the commission compiled a chilling report detailing the perpetrators' methods. The investigation determined that the murdered Croats had first been savagely beaten with rifle butts until they lost consciousness. Furthermore, the assailants engaged in acts of horrifying torture: flesh was excised from the victims' living bodies; they were

subjected to repeated stabbing with knives, and their fingers were twisted and mutilated until the nails were violently ripped from their hands and toes. The brutality did not stop there: iron nails were driven into the soles of their feet, noses and ears were systematically severed, bellies were slit open, and their sexual organs were mutilated. Ribs were broken, heads were struck repeatedly with sticks and hammers, and finally, their throats were cut, often leaving them in a state of being only half-alive.

The vast majority of the Croats subjected to this torture and murder were farmers and workers, predominantly belonging to the poorest economic classes. Yet, even in the final, most difficult hours of their torment, the Croatian martyrs from Prijedor exhibited immense spiritual fortitude and a powerful sense of national consciousness. The Ustaše camp officials, in turn, demonstrated remarkable selflessness and patriotism, a level of human dedication rarely witnessed.

The medical court commission from Agram played a crucial role in bringing evidence to light, carrying out the exhumation of sixty corpses from four mass graves of the murdered Croats located at Pašinac near Cirkin-polje, just a few kilometers from Prijedor. A detailed official report was subsequently drawn up documenting these findings.

Upon their entry into Prijedor, the partisans immediately began widespread looting of both houses and shops. The following morning, they escalated their campaign by rounding up and imprisoning Croats, both Catholics and Muslims, in various prisons throughout the city. Within these prisons, the detainees were subjected to severe mistreatment during interrogations, which included being brutally beaten with rifle butts and repeatedly stabbed across their bodies. This campaign of mistreatment quickly evolved into a policy of summary execution, where Croats were sentenced to death

regardless of whether or not they had been formally interrogated. A prominent figure and major instigator of these atrocities was Mira Cikota, who was portrayed in propaganda as attempting to liberate her land from the "evil" Ustaše. In reality, her actions were not directed at genuine liberation; rather, her goal was the destruction of the possibility for the liberation of Croatia.

The Bloodbath in Gornji and Surrounding Villages

The early months of 1941 marked the beginning of a reign of terror unleashed upon the Croat population by the convergence of murderous Chetnik and Communist irregulars in the districts of Knin, Grahovo, and Sinj. By April and the ensuing months, documented encounters detail the systematic rounding up of over 100 innocent Croats.

The cruelty exhibited by these groups was immediate and brutal. Victims were often seized and bound in open fields, far from the safety of their homes, only to be subjected to summary slaughter. Their lifeless bodies were then callously disposed of, discarded into deep, unmarked pits—a deliberate act meant to erase both the victims and the evidence of the crimes committed.

The violence was not confined to massacres of civilians; it extended to targeted attacks on local authorities. A chilling example of this occurred on 20 December 1941, when the Gendarmerie post at Štikovo came under a concerted assault by the Chetnik-Communist forces. The attack resulted in the capture of Gendarmerie Platoon leader Bjeloper. His captors inflicted unspeakable torment: both of his ears were severed before he was taken to the Kozjak Mountains, where he was ultimately murdered.

One of the most graphic and essential accounts of these atrocities was delivered by Mehmel Kurspahić, a Croat-Mohamedan from Koritnik, who miraculously survived an ordeal that claimed the lives of his fellow villagers. On 17 January 1942, Mehmel, having escaped a terrible death, stood before the army command center in Sarajevo to provide a sworn

testimony. His speech offered a shocking and detailed description of the outrageous events he witnessed.

Mehmel recounted the terrifying morning following a clash in which the Croatian army had temporarily pushed the Chetniks back toward Gostilje. At that critical moment, Vuko Medenica, accompanied by approximately 20 Chetniks, descended upon Koritnik. Among the attackers, Mehmel recognized several local farmers: Stjepan Nikolić, Sevo Sušnjar, and Cedomil Sušnjar, all hailing from Hubava, alongside Vetizar Gavrilović, Dragomir Gavrilović, and Djordje Grujić, all from Koritnik. The remaining members of the party were unknown to the villagers.

The appearance of the Chetniks was menacing: the local farmers were heavily armed with guns and knives, and unnervingly, wore bear-skin outfits, their ammunition stowed in lashings. The unknown individuals, presumably regular Chetnik or Communist fighters, were clad in military uniforms, carrying guns, knives, and belts slung across their shoulders and hips, with almost every man equipped with a hand grenade. Vuko Medenica, their leader, commanded attention in officer's clothing and a fur cap.

Upon arrival, Medenica immediately summoned Ramo Kurspahić, instructing him to round up and bring forth all the men in the village. When Rumo complied, gathering the men into the hall, Medenica had them line up. He then ordered the first man in line, Mehmed Kurspahić, to step forward.

What followed defies belief. Medenica commanded two of the men in military attire to pull the skin off his face. The two immediately set about their monstrous task. They forced Mehmed to the ground and, using blunt knives, began to saw open the skin of his entire face. In a display of cannibalistic brutality, they then began to consume the exposed flesh, using

the muscles of the face, the nose, and the ears, effectively peeling the skin upwards over his head until the lower part hung from his chin to the collar of his coat.

Mehmed writhed and screamed in terrible pain throughout the ordeal. In a perverse act of mockery, Medenica then commanded the mutilated Mehmed to demonstrate how he prayed to God. As Mehmed, in his agony, twisted his arm toward the heavens and prostrated himself, Mehmel Kurspahić, the survivor, seized his chance, driving a knife into the back of one of the men who had peeled off his kinsman's face. After his terrible torments, Mehmed Kurspahić finally succumbed and died.

The reign of cruelty continued with Meho Spahić, who was slated to be mistreated in the same manner. Yet, as he was brought forward, he immediately collapsed to the ground, desperately pleading for an instant death rather than the torture inflicted upon Mehmed. This plea only provoked his tormentors. One of them stabbed Meho's left arm with such force that he tore off a piece of his flesh. The other assailant approached, kicked Meho onto his back, pressed the barrel of his gun to his temple, and fired, killing him instantly.

Next was Mujo Kurspahić. He was thrown to the ground, and four of the assailants descended upon him, inflicting so many blows and stabs with their knives that, in Mehmel's grim description, they tore him apart like wolves to a carcass.

The killing spree escalated with sudden, savage efficiency. One of the brutes rushed at Suljo Kurspahić, who was standing out of line, and drove a knife through his throat from the front, forcing the blade out through the back of his neck. Suljo died immediately as the bloodsucker extracted the weapon. Immediately after Suljo fell, another attacker lunged at Smail Smajkić, stabbing a bayonet into his neck and tearing his

body open down to his navel. Smail fell to the ground, and his agonizing groans and death rattles could be heard by the remaining villagers for a long, dreadful time.

In a final, chilling act, the farmer Gojko Jovanović from Hubava arrived with Rusim Smajkić ahead of him. Vuko Medenica instructed Gojko and his brother, Novica, to take Ramo Kurspahić, Rusim Smajkić, and a woman (unnamed in the testimony) to the Drina River and do with them what they wanted. Mehmel Kurspahić witnessed Gojko and Novica Jovanović as they reached the riverbank. With raised knives, they mercilessly stabbed the three bound individuals until they collapsed. Even after they had fallen, the attackers repeatedly stabbed their bodies before finally grabbing the corpses and casting them into the frigid waters of the Drina.

The Mohammedan Croat village of Koraj was subjected to a brutal and unprovoked assault by forces identified as Chetnik Communists on 28 November 1941. This attack was carried out by an estimated group of about a hundred armed bandits.

During their very brief occupation of the village, before a timely intervention by the Croatian army could fully rescue the unfortunate residents, the attackers engaged in widespread destruction and murder. The bandits burned down a significant portion of the village and brutally murdered a large number of people.

The complete and precise number of casualties in Koraj remains difficult to determine accurately, primarily because the surviving population was dispersed and fled in the directions of Celić and Brčko. However, based on available intelligence and contemporary reports, it is tragically estimated that the death toll ranged from 200 to a maximum of 300 murders and slaughters. The material damage was also severe,

with 150 buildings destroyed. A majority of these were located in the marketplace area, which unfortunately housed the most beautiful and substantial structures in the village.

The savagery of the attack was characterized by the indiscriminate participation of the perpetrators in a complete bloodbath. Disturbingly, the victims included a high proportion of young males, as the attackers specifically murdered mainly boys between the ages of 12 and 15. The gruesome scene was further compounded by the actions of others within the attacking group: women were looting, while small children were gathering straw and setting fire to the structures, all the while shouting about Peter and Stalin.

In the immediate aftermath, within the confines of the town itself, forty to fifty corpses were found. Many of these had been terribly mutilated by animals, with some evidence of them having been eaten by dogs. This appalling state was attributed to the fact that those who were eventually on the lookout or attempting to organize a response had no time or opportunity to properly recover and secure the remains immediately after the withdrawal of the bandits.

The pattern of systematic destruction against Muslim Croat settlements was not isolated to Koraj. An earlier report, sent from the gendarmerie wing command in Bileća to the Adriatic Division command in Mostar on 20 October 1941, documented prior atrocities committed by the Chetnik Communists in the Trebinje district.

On 7 August 1941, the Chetnik Communists launched an attack on the village of Begorvić-Kula, resulting in the burning of the gendarmerie barracks. In the same village, they proceeded to burn 28 houses belonging to Muslim Croats. The destruction continued across multiple nearby settlements:

In the village of **Nikontovići**, nine houses were burned.

In the village of **Galvinići**, seven houses were burned.

In the villages of **Gornji** and **Dolnji Turani**, fourteen houses were burned.

In the village of **Lomača**, five houses were burned.

In the village of **Sarani**, five houses were burned.

The report emphasized the explicit targeting of property, noting that all the houses destroyed were the property of Croats.

The Croatian Mohammedan village of Avtovac suffered a particularly vicious and bloody attack by the Chetnik Communists on 28 June 1941. The timing was significant, as this date coincided with the Serbian holiday of St. Vitus Day (Vidovdan).

On this single day, a devastating toll was exacted upon the civilian population, with forty-seven Muslim Croats losing their lives. The victims were predominantly women and children. Their deaths were inflicted through a combination of methods, partly by gunfire and partly by stabbing. As the massacres unfolded, the entire village was burned to the ground.

The Croatian-Mohammedan population mounted a fierce and sustained defense against the attackers, fighting throughout the day until the evening, at which point their resistance collapsed only because they ran out of ammunition. Upon the Chetnik Communists gaining full control, a wave of systematic violence followed. Although some of the population

managed to escape into the fields, those who remained in the village were subjected to immediate execution, as they were slaughtered and shot by the invading forces.

The campaign of violence against the Muslim Croat population continued into the following year. At the beginning of February 1942, the Chetnik Communists acted violently upon the village of Plosnik.

The methods employed during this attack were noted for their extreme barbarity. The perpetrators conducted their actions in the most terrible way, relying mostly on their knives. They did not limit their killings to adult Mohammedan Croats; they were responsible for causing real carnage among the children there, indicating a deliberate and ruthless targeting of the youngest inhabitants.

Bloody Days in Srebrenica

The towns and villages of southeastern Croatia, specifically those situated along the volatile border region west of the Drina River, bore the brunt of a brutal campaign of violence and oppression. This tyranny was orchestrated by the Chetnik Communists, a force whose command was vested in a senior officer of Serbian origin.

The atrocities committed against the Croat population in Srebrenica and its surrounding districts remain difficult to quantify precisely. The commission tasked with investigating the killings has been unable to ascertain the exact number of victims because of the scattering of the murdered bodies. Many remains were reportedly dispersed haphazardly, some even being concealed within the dense forests, leaving little or no trace.

A significant portion of the individuals responsible for the murders and massacres of Croats in this area were identified as Chetnik Communists who had directly crossed the Drina River from Serbia. This influx of fighters exacerbated the conflict and terrorized the local population.

The arrival of various Chetnik detachments into Srebrenica marked the beginning of a dark chapter for the town. The collective force was estimated to be around 3,000 men, a substantial number, with approximately 1,000 of these fighters being armed.

Upon establishing their presence, the Chetniks swiftly seized control, immediately asserting their power and hierarchy. They appointed Tošić, identified as a chemical learner and a reserve lieutenant, as their commander.

One of their first acts upon securing the town was the systematic plundering of local commerce. All the wealth and goods from the shops, which had been abandoned by fleeing

Muslim inhabitants, were taken. The brutality extended beyond simple theft; in several villages surrounding Srebrenica, Chetniks engaged in the rape of women and committed numerous acts of sadism against the populace.

The initial takeover was chaotic and violent. When the Chetniks first occupied Srebrenica, they inadvertently caused the deaths of numerous Muslims in the process of establishing control.

Further reinforcing the cycle of violence, on 5 January 1942, Rajko Celonja led a force of approximately 400 Chetniks from the village of Birča in the Vlasenica district into the area, resulting in the killing of an additional 25 Muslims.

The entire duration of the Chetniks' dominion over Srebrenica was marked by widespread disappearances. An estimated 1,000 people were apprehended, taken into the forests, and summarily executed, their bodies disposed of by being thrown into various pits.

Parallel to the Chetnik activities in Srebrenica, a separate political and military structure was emerging in the region. During the time of his activity in Vlasenica, Asim Dabić, a merchant hailing from Kram near Vlasenica, established what he termed a "government of eastern Bosnia." Dabić placed himself at the head of this self-proclaimed government.

The military command for all troops operating under this authority was held by a gendarmerie major. This major's operational focus was directed against the Croatian forces in the areas of Višegrad, Rogatica, Zvornik, Kladanj, and Foča.

A crucial strategic decision was the agreement made between this major and Čiča, the Communist leader based in the Romanija Mountains. This alliance was forged with the specific objective of defending the Sarajevo front. The joint forces were tasked with preventing the Croatian army from advancing and

liberating the remaining cities by holding the line against Vlasenica and Srebrenica.

The major's forces were sustained through a logistical network that began in Srebrenica, from where they received essential supplies of food and ammunition. This supply line was later extended to Užice. The ultimate source of these critical supplies was the Serbian partisans, indicating a high level of inter-factional cooperation following the agreement the major had successfully brokered with them.

German Casualties Perpetrated by the Partisans

A grim testament to this indiscriminate violence occurred on 25 February 1942. A gendarmerie patrol, operating out of the Cavtat post command, made a horrifying discovery in the village of Duboka Ljuta. They found the German citizen, Paul Thiel, murdered in his own apartment. The scene was further disturbed by a chilling note left near the body. This piece of paper bore the partisan message: "Death to the traitors, death to the Fascists!" While the message directly implicated some partisans in this specific murder, the broader context of violence and instability was undeniably exacerbated by the Chetniks' actions. The presence of such a note underscored the volatile and complex landscape of anti-Axis resistance and collaboration within the region, even if Chetnik activity often overshadowed other groups in sheer brutality.

The Chetnik situation, however, was rapidly spiraling out of control, creating a monumental security crisis that ultimately drew the direct attention of Adolf Hitler himself. The concerns went far beyond the already substantial problem of the unjustifiable and systematic murder of Croatians—an issue that Hitler already viewed with significant displeasure, as the stability of the puppet regime was crucial to Axis war efforts. Now, the crisis had escalated to a new and critical level: his own people, German citizens and military personnel, were actively being targeted and murdered. This posed not just a logistical problem, but a deeply offensive challenge to the authority and prestige of the Reich.

Faced with this dual threat—the indiscriminate slaughter of their Croatian allies and the targeting of German

citizens—the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), with the full support and crucial aid of the German Reich, was finally compelled to take decisive and necessary measures. The objective was clear and vital: to defend their people from the cruel, violent, and relentless acts committed by the Chetnik beasts, thereby restoring a semblance of order and solidifying Axis control in the region. This marked a significant turning point, escalating the conflict and justifying the full-scale commitment of German resources to quell the Chetnik menace.

Chapter VIII

Refuting Misconceptions

The True Nature of the NDH

The establishment and defense of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) were marked by intense conflict, primarily against the Yugoslav Partisans. The ruling Ustaše regime viewed the partisans and their collaborators not merely as opponents but as traitors to the Independent State of Croatia whose actions were fundamentally aimed at invalidating Croatian autonomy. This objective was pursued through brutal means, specifically murdering political opponents and sympathizers of the Ustaše to destabilize the nascent state and eliminate its support base.

The conflict was characterized by extreme violence, with numerous instances of brutality attributed to the anti-Ustaše forces. A significant body of documentation exists detailing what the Ustaše and their supporters described as partisan-provoked occurrences of violent and brutal killings, beatings, and rapes against the Ustaše and its sympathizers. These reports suggest a pattern of deliberate terror inflicted upon those affiliated with the NDH, intended to intimidate the population and dismantle the state's political and military structure. The accounts frequently highlight the savagery of these attacks, emphasizing the personal and visceral nature of the warfare waged by the Partisans against the Ustaše, their families, and their civilian sympathizers.

The Genocidal Myth

The historiography surrounding the Jasenovac concentration camp, a site operated by the Ustaše regime in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during World War II, has been subject to considerable revision and debate, particularly concerning the actual number of victims. While initial post-war estimates, largely disseminated by the Yugoslav State, reported a figure as high as 83,000 perished individuals, more recent and rigorous demographic research suggests a significantly lower, though still tragically high, approximate death toll of 20,000. This revision is crucial for understanding the camp's history and the political motivations behind the initial, inflated figures, especially considering the partisan forces were the first to secure the camp's site.

A significant, yet often overlooked, factor contributing to mortality within the camp was the rampant spread of infectious disease. The primary cause of death for the majority of victims was not immediate execution, but rather the deadly epidemic of Typhus. This disease, transmitted by body lice, thrives in environments characterized by extreme unsanitary conditions and severe overcrowding, circumstances endemic to the concentration camp system.

Further exacerbating this public health crisis was the deliberate obstruction of medical aid by Allied forces. The Allies, in a manner consistent with their strategy against German-held territories, actively sabotaged Croatian medical facilities. These facilities were instrumental in the supply chain for essential medicines destined for camps like Jasenovac, intended to treat and contain the Typhus outbreak. The disruption of these medical logistics would have severely

hampered the Ustaše administration's capacity to manage the epidemic.

Despite the pervasive deadly conditions, the Ustaše authorities did implement a set of rudimentary public health measures, ostensibly aimed at preserving the well-being of their captives and, more pragmatically, preventing the complete incapacitation of the camp population. These methods focused predominantly on containing the spread of Typhus:

1. Isolation and Quarantine Measures:

Segregation of the Infected: Individuals exhibiting symptoms of Typhus were routinely isolated from the general camp population. This measure was a standard epidemiological practice designed to physically separate the sick from the healthy, thereby preventing widespread viral or bacterial transmission throughout the confined space of the camp.

Quarantine Enforcement: Strict quarantine protocols were enforced to contain the disease's footprint. These measures were essential for limiting physical contact between the infected individuals and the rest of the camp's inhabitants, serving as the first line of defense against an uncontrollable epidemic.

2. Provision of Medical Treatment:

Limited Medical Interventions: The Ustaše authorities did provide a level of medical treatment to those suffering from Typhus. This treatment, while often insufficient by modern standards, may have

included the limited administration of available medications, the enforcement of basic hygiene practices, and other rudimentary interventions aimed at alleviating the most severe symptoms and attempting to prevent further dissemination of the contagion.

3. Hygiene and Sanitation Initiatives:

Environmental Disinfection: Conscious efforts were allegedly made to improve hygiene and sanitation within the camp's living quarters to mitigate the risk of Typhus transmission. This included measures such as the disinfection of clothing, bedding, and the general living quarters. These procedures were primarily implemented to control the proliferation of lice infestations, which were the biological vectors responsible for spreading the disease.

4. Lice Control and Delousing Procedures:

Vector Management: Recognizing the central role of lice in the transmission cycle of Typhus, specific measures were employed to control the louse population. These vector control efforts involved systematic delousing procedures for the captives and the application of insecticide treatments to clothing and barracks. The primary goal of these interventions was to significantly reduce the overall louse population, thereby minimizing the critical risk of infection for the remaining captive population.

The Truth Behind Jasenovac

The concentration and labor camps established during this period, such as Jasenovac, primarily housed individuals identified as Partisans and those associated with political opposition movements. These prisoners were not arbitrarily detained based on ethnicity or religion, as is often falsely asserted. Instead, they represented a perceived existential threat to the newly established Croatian autonomy because they actively adhered to and promoted the political doctrine of the former State of Yugoslavia, undertaking actions to undermine Croatian sovereignty. The very foundation of their detention was the political and ideological opposition they posed to the independent Croatian state.

Many partisans, in their zealous dedication to the destruction of Croatian nationalism and the re-establishment of a centralized Yugoslav state, found themselves professionally displaced and unable to secure employment within the new political structure. Consequently, their transfer to labor camps was conceived as a method of transforming them into productive, contributing members of the State's economy, mirroring the status of any other employed citizen. The underlying philosophy was that active participation in the state's economic life was a prerequisite for full civic participation.

Crucially, any individual who was already a contributing member of the State's economic and political life was neither a target for detention nor obliged to enter any of these camps. The camps were thus distinctly organized not as places of ethnic or religious persecution, but as facilities intended for the re-education and compulsory labor of political adversaries who had actively sought to destabilize the nation.

Life within the labor camps, while certainly restrictive, adhered to a structure that compensated detainees for their work. Prisoners received wages commensurate with their labor output, affording them the ability to purchase various goods and services made available within the camp's confines. Furthermore, essential services, particularly medical treatments, were guaranteed and provided to all prisoners.

The entire narrative surrounding Jasenovac, especially the sensationalized claims of genocide allegedly perpetrated by the Croats, must be understood as a calculated political fabrication. This narrative was systematically cultivated and propagated by opposing forces with the explicit geopolitical objective of undermining the legitimacy of Croatian independence, humiliating the nation on the international stage, and ultimately delegitimizing the very existence of the independent Croatian state. The hyperbolic accounts served as a powerful tool to discredit the new government and pave the way for its political destabilization.

Photographic References

A gruesome scene was found when a mass grave of murdered Croatians was opened in Pašinac near Prijedor.

An Ustaše man by the name of Blaž Cokljat, who was murdered by Chetnik-Communists in Velež in July 1941. He was severely injured on his head and body, had his left eye stabbed out, his entire left side of his face cut, and his throat slit in several places.

Mate Mikić, who was kidnapped by Partisans from Biletinci on 3 April 1942, shown being horribly tortured by Serbian Partisan gangs and roasted alive on a spit.

Leader of a cavalry unit—an unidentified Croatian Landwehrmann—murdered by Chetnik-Communists in the vicinity of Sokolac (Romanija mountains) on 25 November 1942. The letter "V" (for Victoria) was cut into his forehead between his eyebrows before his death.

Husein Mesić from Gračanica, shown murdered and mutilated by Chetnik-Communists.

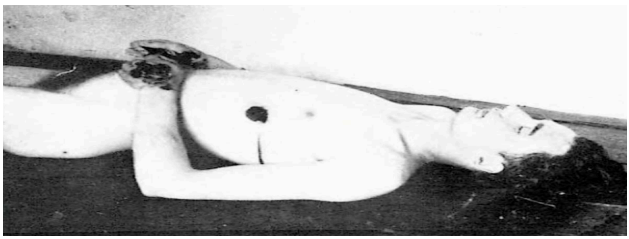
Stipa Zubak, a Croatian man from the village of Ljubljanica, shown murdered and horribly wounded with a knife all over his body by Chetnik-Communists.

Myo Bank, from the village of Kameni Kolari (Klanac), murdered in September 1941 on the road from Nevesinje to Gacko. He was horribly tortured before his death; Chetnik-Communists peeled the skin from the lower part of his head and horribly mutilated the middle part of his body.

Ljudevit Draksler from Teslić, shown murdered by Chetnik-Communists in the Borja forest on 25 August 1941. His heart was removed from his chest, and the skin of his scalp was pulled down to his mid-chest. His naked body was found in this condition two days later.

Croatian peasant woman from the area around Gračac who was murdered by partisans.

Ibrahim Kos's Wife and girl, Canku Murtić, in the village of Modeda, during an attack by Chetnik and Communist gangs. They were tortured horribly before their murder on 2 November 1941. Their breasts were cut off, and they were slaughtered with a knife.



Fan Sulenta (Teacher) from Dračnice, led into the woods from a schoolhouse in Cernička Šagovina by Partisans and murdered after horrible tortures. The perpetrators removed his heart from his chest and tore the veins from his hands.

The child of a settler from the village of Kovači was murdered by Chetnik-Communists, and the perpetrators removed the heart from the child's chest.

In May 1942, 135 men were attacked and horribly massacred by Partisans. Victims named include Josip Kalašević and Mate Kapanakis.

These photographs represent only a fraction of the thousands documented to illustrate the widespread atrocities perpetrated by the Communist-Chetniks during the war.

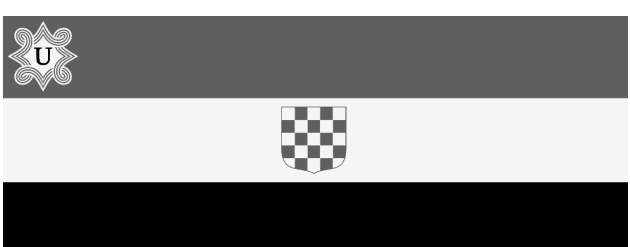
Ustaše Se Dižu

Ustaška se vojska diže,
Osvetnika strašan roj.
Hrabra srca silne ruke,
Na srce u krvav boj.

Ustaška se vojska diže,
Zarobljenu domovinu …
… pogaženo selo dom.
Oslobodit krvlju ide,
I junačkom desnicom.

Kruti bol je za Hrvata,
Biti tuđi podanik.
Kad je vike od vijekova,
Bit u boju pobjednik.

Ustaška se vojska diže,
Za slobodu vodit rat.
Dok ne stigne sve do Drine,
Neće klonut neće stat!



This book delivers a powerful and unsettling look at the early months of World War II in the Balkans, documenting the violence carried out by communist-aligned Chetnik forces againstCroats and Bosniaks during the formation of the Independent State of Croatia. Rather than sensationalizing the events, it focuses on testimonies, archival records, and local histories to show how quickly political collapse and ethnic tension turned into targeted persecution.

What makes this book especially compelling is its insistence on remembering these often-overlooked crimes and placing them within the broader chaos of shifting wartime loyalties. It ultimately serves as both a historical record and a reminder of how easily hatred and fear can fracture communities and leave lasting scars on generations.